

**Exhibiting Religious Objects Within Museums:  
Scientific Concept and Reflections on a Museum of Religion in Tunisia**

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*“Religion is part of the human make-up. It's also part of our cultural and intellectual history. Religion was our first attempt at literature, the texts, our first attempt at cosmology, making sense of where we are in the universe, our first attempt at health care, believing in faith healing, our first attempt at philosophy.”*

*Christopher Hitchens*

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# Abbreviations

**AMVPPC** Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de Promotion Culturelle

**HMRC** Hammamet Museum of Religions and Civilization

**ICCROM** International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property

**ICOM** International Council of Museums

**ICOMOS** International Council on Monuments and Sites

**INP** Institut national du patrimoine tunisien

**MAHJ** Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme

**MUCEM** Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

**PCA** Principal Component Analysis

**KMO** Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

**PQ** perceived quality

**PV** Perceived Value

**L** Loyalty

## Abstract

In the last decades, religion started occupying a growing position in museums, and religious object and lived experience have gained importance in the new museology. The pairing of both agencies triggered various challenges, which required a pluri-disciplinary dialogue to bridge the gap between spiritual aspects and aesthetic claims. Tunisia endures a mismanagement of the issues of religion in public institutions, and a large section of the population is not acquainted with religious otherness. My research aims at understanding the reasons for concealing religious otherness and plurality from public view in social, political, cultural, and museum arenas.

This study explores Tunisian museums' slight interpretation of religious matter and their compressed conception that primarily covers a patrimony's tangible aspect and neglects its intangible dimension. It also points out the Tunisian museums' crisis in terms of displaying religion and attempts to identify the causes of public disinterest. It investigates new methods and approaches to reconcile religion, provide tangible encounters with sacred tradition, and spark the interest of Tunisian museumgoers in religion.

My thesis tackles the issue of the musealization of religious objects, the concern of sacredness in the museum arena, and tries to identify the points of failure in terms of religious display policy and consistency with museological requirement. It shares an accurate insight into Tunisian exhibits' negative and positive points, sensitive areas of display, and gives details of visitors' experience, criticism, and requirement.

The aim is to examine the efficiency of a museum of religion in challenging monolithic and polemical perception of religion and the futility of resisting the disclosure of religious plurality and multiculturalism. This study reviews and considers a new approach of displaying religion through the juxtaposition of religious objects and the mixing of religious, historical, ethnological, and modern artistic registers. It also proposes an architectural, museological, museographic, scenographic, and thematic conception of a museum of religion and gives a workable methodological and practical proposal of a museum of religion in line with scientific requirement of the study of religion and museology.

# Introduction

Worldwide religion represents a significant component in most traditional and modern societies, democracies, and cultures, and forms an organizing, inspiring, legitimizing, and social power that have gained an unexpected anthropological and political importance during the last few centuries. Therefore, religious institutions and organizations morphed into a crucial identity factor that generates cohesion among people and every so often triggers tension, agitation, and violence. Religion forms an integral part of the social fabric that has a considerable influence on other social institutions and groups.<sup>1</sup> It is not a particular moment in history since it belongs to the nature of man that strives to secure a common good, however, through time, this area of dynamism, socialization, belonging, and collective emotions has morphed into a historical and geopolitical force. Religion represents a central issue for individual and collective identity even in modern societies in which agnostic thought increasingly dominates the social and political sphere. The separation of religion from public policy has not abolished its involvement in the political and social decision-making processes, and even if secularization increasingly marks urban and modern civilizations, many people still show a great curiosity and inquisitiveness for spiritual and religious experiences. This social body plays influential roles in matters of personal, collective identity and societal activities and lays down the rules governing life in society. It is not only the reflection or emanation of society, but rather its foundation that offers stability, solidarity, integration, unity, and cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

However, religions do sometimes the exact opposite, failing to fulfil its integrative function and morphing into a source of contestation and conflict that challenges the establishing social order instead of legitimizing it and thus gives rise to explosive communitarian reactions. More importantly, it might serve as a source of illusion and control to legitimize vision and interests of the ruling class over the oppressed classes.<sup>3</sup> History has shown that the instrumentalization of religion and its interference in politics is able to trigger revolutionary consciousness and fundamentalism, ideological violence, and create feelings of social alienation. However, plural religions as a social norm differs from this logic since it generates a harmonious co-existence between different belief systems and enables individuals to build a personal religious construct. It is important to stress that the earliest proponents of religious pluralism and acceptance emerged in Asia with Hinduism and Buddhism and their respect to the religious otherness of

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<sup>1</sup> Vaillancourt, J. G. (1991). *Religion et société: une approche sociologique*. Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses, 20 (2), p 137.

<sup>2</sup> Durkheim, E. (2013). *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, presses universitaire de France, PUF; 7e édition, p. 490-496.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, K., & Baraquin, A. (1975). *Critique du droit politique hégélien. Trad. et introd de A. Baraquin*. Editions sociales. p. 198.

others.<sup>4</sup> The transformation regarding religion has intensified following the European enlightenment and the entrenchment of democracy and freedom of conscience and religion. Many countries from the Muslim world such as Tunisia, Indonesia, and Turkey were hailed as models for acceptance of religious otherness and pluralism until recent events called that process into question. Tunisia is one of the few countries that has escaped the fate of Islamization of its social institutions. The question is why this particularity in the Tunisian case?

Of all the states of the Maghreb, Tunisia is the most "atypical" country in relation to religion, as by adopting an original and innovative political approach, it managed to limit Islam's social and political scope and to avoid a head-on confrontation between political and religious systems.<sup>5</sup> This reformist path attempted a synthesis between Islamic tradition and Western modernity and aimed at reconciling religion with fundamental value, treating it as a private matter and depriving it from its substantial social dimension.<sup>6</sup> However, the State's assumption of responsibility for society encountered stiff societal resistance and identity attachment to traditional visions, which has, on the one hand, created an ideological rigidity against capitalist modernization, and on the other, it has established repressive uniformity against religious minorities. The openness to religious diversity was extremely limited and inflexible because the French colonial occupation has enormously traumatized the population and overshadowed the Islamic tradition, which recalled the will of "re-Christianizing" the local culture and social structure during the Crusades of Saint Louis.<sup>7</sup> Tunisian Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i are identified with their differences and reduced to their otherness, which forced them to keep their identities hidden for fear of being rejected. This identity enclosure led to fear, suspicion, and systematic negation of religious otherness and fostered religious and cultural antagonisms, which had fuelled social unrest and political instability. For the purpose of weakening the population's religious resistance and identity closure, the first Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba leveraged social progress through arts and culture by launching school reforms, religious restructuring (abolishment of Zitounian education), societal openness (women emancipation) and sponsored museums with the creation of more than 20 cultural projects across the country.<sup>8</sup> Through museums, Bourguiba aimed at launching a genuine cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Meister, C. V. (Ed.). (2011). *The Oxford handbook of religious diversity*. Oxford University Press, p. 62-65.

<sup>5</sup> Camau, M., & Abdelkefi, J. (1987). *Tunisie au présent: Une modernité au-dessus de tout soupçon?* (Vol. 3). Editions Du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique: Presses Du Cnrs, Diffusion, p. 11-20.

<sup>6</sup> Baubérot, J. (1990). *La laïcité, quel héritage?: de 1789 à nos jours* (No. 8). Labor et Fides.p 79.

<sup>7</sup> Fendri, M. (April 2012). *Une histoire nationale controversée La politique culturelle de la Tunisie face à un tournant décisif?* Tunis Eurolog Symposium, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Habib bourguiba was the Tunisian president (1957- 1987), who bet on society progress through religious and cultural openness. Martel, P. A. (1999). *Habib Bourguiba, un homme, un siècle*, Les Editions du Jaguar, p. 60-81

pluralism, promoting religious coexistence but mainly tackling social fragmentation, alienation, and isolation. He knew that museums as educational venues would be able to play a key role in Tunisia's modern formation and in the production of modern subjects by fighting the so-called magical, supernatural beliefs and veneration of relics in religious monasteries (*zāwiyah*) that had dominated the country after the independence. The enhancement of shared culture through museums provides a coherent and modern foundation to bring several social actors together around a common memory, creates new ties between religious communities, and shapes new forms of social relation. Bourguiba knew that investing in a culture of openness, integration, and tolerance that values a collective historical and identity image (Western, Eastern, and African) would be the best way to fight against religious confinement and the ideological foundation. Nonetheless, his museums' policy refrained from tackling religion together and had in the first place an outward-oriented tourist dimension aimed at boosting the national economy instead of worrying about the interactions of local populations with other religions, cultures, and identity markers. The museums open to the public did not query society's cultural and religious dynamics or produce an interreligious discourse related to political, territorial, or ethical considerations. The exhibitions did not stimulate a desire to reach out to each other or enable deepening mutual understanding of objects, religious dimensions, or personal and collective experiences. There was no real intention to provoke a religious encounter in the museum arena; on the contrary, religions were displayed separately, and this comes down to a fundamental question: why this reluctance to create a genuine interreligious dialogue in museums?

In religion, it is essentially a matter of "*encounter*", whether it is a deep encountering of one's self, encountering God, or encountering other faiths, and this encounter does not mean a conviction shift but rather a recognition of the others, not by erasing their differences, but by considering them with respect.<sup>9</sup> Islam is not opposed to this logic since it supports and encourages complete freedom in interreligious dialogue and calls for critical thinking and rationality in this interchange. Many surah in the Quran clearly advise Muslims on interreligious dialogue: "*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best*"<sup>10</sup>. That being said, there is no sacrilege or downside to exhibit different religious objectivity together and create ties between religious communities, on the contrary, it would positively impact religion's internal dialogue and create incentives for

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<sup>9</sup> Bontemps, V. (2014). *Le dialogue interreligieux*, Pastoralia – N°1, p 7, retrieved on 29.04.2019 from [cathoutils.be/wp-content/uploads/Pastoralia-1-light-Dossier.pdf](http://cathoutils.be/wp-content/uploads/Pastoralia-1-light-Dossier.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Surah An-Nahl 16:125, retrieved on 02.11.2018 from [www.quran.com](http://www.quran.com)

individuals to relativize their divisions, put their criticism into perspective, and accept religious otherness. As shown in many religious exposures in France, Canada, England, Scotland, and Turkey, the interbreeding of spiritual experiences and religious tradition in a museum may not be a threat for Islamic identity. Rather, it prompts question and open conversation in an engaging way, which is required to strengthen common identity and public trust, to help overcome prejudices and realize that being acquainted with other faiths is not a religious sin. Indeed, going deeper into the religious meaning of art “*does not require participating in the religion as an adherent*”,<sup>11</sup> in return, it can significantly improve the aesthetic experience, which represents an additional asset to a deeper understanding of religious works. Museums finely invite visitors to encounter religious and spiritual contents but surely does not force them, preach a sermon, or ask them to kneel against religious objects. Another important consideration that should be emphasized is that religion is improperly approached in Tunisian history and art museums since there is no consideration for a property’s religious significance, spiritual context, and living meanings, which form important elements, if not the most significant, of an objects integrity. Exhibitions on religion primary tackle archaic and traditional beliefs as well as religions of the ancient world (Numidians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines) in a tangible aspect and neglect an object’s sacred dimension. This isolation based on an aesthetic positioning hijacks the devotional meaning and spiritual power of objects by displaying them as materials of curiosity to amaze tourists through a fine classical archaeology that does not mandate open dialogue across religions.

For Neji Jalloul, who was appointed Minister of Education in Tunisia on February 6, 2015, this stance led to the public’s misconception and unfamiliarity with Christian, Jewish, or Baha’i religions and cultures, which, in his opinion, deserve a prominent place in the upcoming museum projects.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there is a huge gulf between museums, curriculum, and religions, and there is no consultation for people of faith in a museum setting. The friction over challenging areas such as Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam should be phased out, and faith communities should be consulted to improve the interpretation and consistency of the religious items. Tunisian interpretation of religious matter is very slight and most of the objects are displayed and understood in a purely aesthetic dimension due to the distancing and compressed conception that primarily covers a patrimony’s tangible aspect and reduces the intangible dimension to a few observable facets of a way of living and religious practices. This perception

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<sup>11</sup> Freudenheim, T. L. (2017). *Museums and religion: Uneasy companions*. Religion in museums, p 182

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul, Tunisian minister of education, archeologist and specialist of Islam.

doesn't tackle the core of religious experiences nor religions' particular characteristics, traditions, and customs inherited and morphed over time into social norms. Restricting the scope of exhibiting the religious heritage to material dimensions is unjustly constraining as it erases objects' spiritual and "sacred" dimension which are highly important for their survival. The notion of sacredness is incredibly close to museology's key ideas and central themes in knowing that the museum itself was in essence a "temple".<sup>13</sup> Tunisian museums seem to function in opposition to this logic because the religious traditions and practices, which underpin a priceless intangible value, are not considered as one of categories of "museality". Is it not time to emerge from the paralyzing grip of narrowing the religious heritage to historical, artistic, and aesthetic dimensions, place higher value on these objects' meaning, spirituality, and sacredness, and address religious contemporary concerns?

For Jürgen Habermas, it is important to place the State on a non-religious footing to ensure a successful participation of citizens in social shared practices and not privilege one side at the cost of another.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, concealing religious otherness, hiding religions, and keeping other faiths in shade in Tunisia may, over time, trigger social uncertainty, religious hatred, and accelerate the collapse of modernity. This is illustrated by the departure of several Tunisian Jews and Christians from living abroad in France and Israel, and, at the same time, the rise of Islamism among youth. There is no longer a way religious metamorphosis can be hidden from public view, and a knowledge exchange about various religions has become a social and ethical imperative. Religious diversity has become a subject of growing concern for modern Tunisian society, which implies opening up areas of common discourse at museums to break misleading images of otherness would be beneficial. It has also become a priority to create specific areas of exhibition that question similarity, discordance, and even tensions between communities and provide a rich framework for critical and reflective interaction and instructive exchange of religious knowledge. The fear of litigation and the discomfort with religion should no longer impede Tunisian museums from tackling religious currents and identities more meticulously. The notion of identity itself became constitutive of a museum, and their interbreeding would provide answers, support claimed identity, share a common culture and memory, and reduce distinction concerns.<sup>15</sup> Besides, religious identities deserve the same importance given to other

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<sup>13</sup> Gilman, B. I. (1923). *Museums Ideals of Purpose and Methods*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2 ed. p 10-17.

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, J. (2006). *Religion in the public sphere*. *European journal of philosophy*, 14 (1), p 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Georgel, C. (1994). *Le musée, lieu d'identité*. In *La jeunesse des musées, catalogue d'exposition*, Paris, RMN, p 9-13.

identities, and museology has the potential to transmit their markers by means of its communicative and discursive aspects that develop social ties and civic engagement.<sup>16</sup>

My thesis is that one of the most effective solutions to lift the veil of ignorance, misconception, and prejudice about religion; meet social claims; calm identity tension; and reconcile people, primarily with each other and secondly with religion, remains a body specialized in the museology of religion: a museum of religion. Tackling religion in a museum setting is a subject close to my heart and has always grabbed my research interest. I devoted all my master research proposals to explore the museological requirements needed to display religion in a museum setting. I succeeded in developing two scientific museum concepts, of which the project to create a Museum of Art and History of Tunisian Judaism saw the light of day in 2012. In collaboration with the Jewish association Dar Dhekra, my theoretical project has materialized with a private Museum (Memory House) located in La Goulette, which tackles the Judeo-Tunisian identity loss and promotes Jewish heritage. The creation of such a museum was unthinkable before the Revolution because of fear of social stigma and political rigidity. Nonetheless, this museum has come to fruition thanks to gained democracy and freedom from the year 2011 onward, which is an encouraging sign to work on the agenda of a museum of religion. Such “*community harmony museum*” would play a key role in tackling polemical and outmoded public perception of other religions deemed as a threat for the Muslim community.

### ***Research Relevance in the Study of Religion***

At this point in time, modern societies are no longer structured by religious aspects and face an increasing religious indifference. Consequently, religious heritage goes through various misunderstandings, blunders, violent acts, and progressively fall into oblivion. The terrorist attack against Bardo museum in 2015 is concrete evidence of that fact because even if it intended to tarnish Tunisia’s image, democracy, and openness, it has also attacked its religious heritage. This shows clearly that Tunisian religious diversity in contemporary discourse is not properly taught, shown, and communicated to the public. In Tunisia, there is no practice of multiculturalism. Religious knowledge is fuzzy and ideas vague, one could say almost non-existent, especially due to the topic sensitivity and personal convictions that get in way of openness and understanding. Visitors enter museums with their own preferences and requirements and carry cultural baggage charged with individual social and religious

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<sup>16</sup> Davallon, J. (1999). *L'exposition à l'oeuvre*. Stratégie de communication et médiation symbolique. Communication et civilisation, Paris: L'Harmattan.p. 378.

backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> The ideological values and misinformation condition visitors' behaviour, acceptance, and criticism of works displaying religion and often hamper their comprehension of other beliefs. In Tunisia, the situation is further complicated since the religious consciousness is fractured and scattered and citizens have neither the needed knowledge nor codes to decipher religious objects' meaning and symbolism. Then the question arises: Why is it important to put focus on a heritage whose values, authenticity, and significance are not well received by the audience and generate interest only for a minority population?

Even if religion and holiness became relics of the past, "*dissolved in the acid of modernity*"<sup>18</sup> and no longer seems to correspond to the present reality and modern ways of thinking, it would be unjust to discard them from the public sphere (museums), as they directly affect critical areas of national identity, culture, education, memory, and heritage. The study of religion is increasingly focusing on exploring this concern in order to find ways to improve visitor-object engagement, avoid museum misconception, and create connections between human and nonhuman structures (curator/objects), which are highly important in providing access to religious patrimony.<sup>19</sup> Tackling this challenging topic in the museum setting includes deeper religious, spiritual, societal, and identity reflections, especially in a society searching for new points of reference and stability and facing ideological tensions, as it is in the Tunisian case. Tunisian religious heritage offers a culture, tradition, know-how, and a human history, and devoting a museum for this religious wealth would help people adhere to the notion of collective belonging. Furthermore, it would reduce the disinterest in this legacy that led to irremediable material and immaterial losses because it has reduced it to ideology claims, which is considerably reductive, if not deleterious, and reflects a "*religious illiteracy*".<sup>20</sup> Dedicating a museum to religion in Tunisian heritage seems necessary for three primary reasons: firstly, to protect and display the religious legacy being a core part of the national history and identity (conservative service); secondly, to contribute toward creating greater understanding, respect, and tolerance in society (community harmonization service); thirdly, to provide different ways of understanding and interpreting religious matters.

The artistic and cultural values of religious heritage are largely accepted and understood by the audience, whereas the religious and sacred values seem more difficult to grasp. Proof of this is

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, M. (2007). *Rethinking evolution in the museum: Envisioning African origins*. Routledge; Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2016). *The museum experience revisited*. Routledge, p. 100-194.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Junior, J. A. (1990). *Beauty and holiness*, p 192.

<sup>19</sup> Dudley, S. H. (2013). *Museum Materialities*. Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations, p 1.

<sup>20</sup> Azria, R. (2003). *Le fait religieux en France*. La Documentation française, p 58.

that the spiritual dimension of religious objects is rarely mentioned in heritage literature, which raises a huge question mark regarding this negligence.<sup>21</sup> The artifact is deemed as "*miracula*" when it provides a source of fascination (aesthetic enjoyment) linked to its beauty, meticulous finish, symbolism, meaning, and authenticity, which invokes an intimate feeling very close to religious awe and reverence.<sup>22</sup> However, in the religious heritage context, the object is perceived as a "*mirabilia*" since it generates a feeling of astonishment, strangeness, and respectful fear. R. Otto is one of the pioneers of the analysis of "sacred experience" and who put emphasis of the fear and dread of divine powers embodied in this experience.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, M. Eliade writes in this regard that: "*Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, homo religious always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real*".<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that there is a paradox between the concept of museology and exhibition of religious objects since museums as exhibition areas display and disclose realities and knowledge to visitors, which, in some way, contravenes the "sacred", deemed as an absolute forbidden reality transcending mankind.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, many scholars maintain that the sacredness does not necessarily mean an absolute prohibition because it may exceed the notion of "*separation*" and reach the notion of "*communion*".<sup>26</sup> Thus, profaning expropriated objects by integrating a secular area (museum) would not constitute a sacrilege against sanctity. There is an aperture angle alternating "sacred" and profane that justify the transfer of objects discarded from worship into a museum and does not set limits to the clarification of their liturgical and devotional significance and functionality. Even if museums constitute a parcel of secularization that sometimes abstract artifacts from their "sacred" context, they are a significant protecting agent to religious objects. J. Simpson has even compared them with asylums that protect artifacts, acting as a sanctuary from iconoclasm.<sup>27</sup> Making religious objects a part of heritage or conservation work includes a shift from the "sacred" to the cultural, especially when it comes to worship objects (ceremonial) that

<sup>21</sup> Poulot, D. (1998). *Patrimoine et modernité*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 311-312.

<sup>22</sup> Babelon, J. P., & Chastel, A. (1981). *La notion de patrimoine*. Editions du CNRS, p. 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Raphael, M. (1997). *Rudolf Otto and the concept of holiness*. Clarendon, p. 200-256.

<sup>24</sup> Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion* (Vol. 81). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, p 202.

<sup>25</sup>Roque, M. I. (2013). *Exposer croyances et cultes: les singularités de la muséologie de religion*. In Religion and Museums, Immaterial and Material Heritage, Umberto Allemandi & C., Torino, p 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p 25.

<sup>27</sup> Simpson, J. (2010). *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition*. Oxford University Press, p 120-123.

involve specific gestures related to the belief.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, displaying a sacred object in a different place in contact with other objects generate a contaminating process of sacredness since sacred objects have the power to spread their sacred aura and spiritual voltage.<sup>29</sup> As the shift goes both ways, approaching these artifacts exclusively in one of two registers appears very reductive in terms of meaning and intellectual appropriation. Firstly, because religious objects have an ongoing life that embody changes according to the sitting in which they are placed, and secondly because of the striking similarities of both registers. There are also close bonds and similarities between museum activities (examination, measurement, cleaning, conservation, and exhibition) and practices carried out by devotees in temples with the devotional objects.<sup>30</sup> Even more important, conservation activity occurred first in temples to maintain in good standing worship properties and subsequently took place at relic's places. The sacralization has resulted in visitation practices in the form of pilgrimages, as in Jerusalem and Mecca, and gave birth to museums such as the Vatican Museum in Italy. However, it is important to point out that some religious objects may lose sacredness in cases of conservation, renovation, and exhibition within museums.

Museology has become with the passing of time one of most effective solutions for safeguarding and preserving disused religious objects because it achieves better visibility for liturgical practices and beliefs, increases awareness and dialogue around religious issues of concern, and puts into value the immaterial dimension of patrimony, which is often neglected in Tunisian museums. The patrimony should not be reduced to a frozen display of religious objects but rather should make use of other contents such as photographs, paintings, oral and video testimonies to provide the audience with better overview, and understanding not only of visible collective expression but also of private practices, which are kept alive in family circles and often go without recognition.<sup>31</sup> Using photographs as a display support does not offend religion because images are found in all religions, but the key challenge is where to find them.<sup>32</sup> A museum of religion has the potential to undertake this task and exhibit objects not only as art pieces but as part of an interpretive religious and historical storytelling that reveal how people experienced their ceremonial practices. This stance would uncover the emotional motivation and spiritual interactions between people of the past and their religious objects. This is the core

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<sup>28</sup> Gruau, M. (1999). *L'homme rituel*. Ed. Métaillé, p. 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Belk, R. W., Wallendorf, M., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (1989). *The sacred and the profane in consumer behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey*. Journal of consumer research, 16(1), p 1-38.

<sup>30</sup> Sullivan, B. M. (2013). *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties*. By Crispin Paine. p 10.

<sup>31</sup> Amar, M. (2008). *Quand la religion entre au musée*. L'exemple de la Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. Cahiers de la Méditerranée, (76), p 15.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, D. (2017). *Museum Collection and the History of Interpretation*. Religion in museums, p 123

function of a museum of religion, since it should bring out the hidden religious observance, lay bare the spiritual beliefs, make objects speak for themselves, explain beliefs, propose a synthesis, and address the key issues related to otherness. The stance should also show the inherent complexity and differences and ambiguity of religions and their unpredictable impact on societies. Religions could constitute symbolic frameworks responsible for social cohesion and as a mobilization tool in times of conflict, but also as an element to legitimize violence, reinforce religious enclosure and exclusion, and to encourage fanaticism. The concept should find a compromise between the adversarial approach of history of religion, ethnology, anthropology museology, and scenography. It is possible with an accurate interpretation to restore meanings, forge connections to the past, and add deep significance to the forgotten “*sacred geometries*”.<sup>33</sup> To put it bluntly, object sacredness lies in a museum's ability to transform the tangible into intangible, the imperceptible into visible, and the not-yet-felt into experienced.<sup>34</sup>

Exploring religion necessitates a challenging approach that both queries visitors' centrality and recognizes objects' agency, which implies a dynamic interdisciplinary exchange to tackle this issue because it triggers several reactions and counter-reactions of religious plurality and otherness. The needed approach should promote reconciliation and social harmony in the midst of religious turmoil and ambiguity in order to help avoid pitfalls of religious ignorance, sensationalism, and inclusion. This will be realized through relativizing and criticizing religious prejudices and stereotypes by using solid scientific knowledge. The historical distance and non-confrontational stance of the study of religion provides an ideal way of addressing religious phenomena and for presenting religious diversity as specific and living realities with a non-polemical and non-theological approach.<sup>35</sup> Using translation and critical hermeneutics, the study of religion provides a prime tool to grasp the meaning of religious phenomena by means of empirical method of investigation.<sup>36</sup> It is able to maintain a balance between religions because it does not serve the interest of any religion and provides a rational and assessable observation. Its comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach is indispensable for undertaking a museum work that tackles religion because it provides a good basis to deal with sensitive topics, pay special attention to objects' sacredness, and inform properly the public of objects'

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<sup>33</sup> Nelson, L. P. (2007). *Sensing the Sacred: Anglican Material Religion in Early South Carolina*. Winterthur portfolio, 41(4), p. 206-207.

<sup>34</sup> Taralon, J. (1966). *Les trésors des églises de France: Avec la collab. de Roseline Maitre Devallon*. Hachette.p 13.

<sup>35</sup> Feltz, B. (2008). *Théories de l'évolution, religions et modernités*. Éducation comparée, 1, p 33-45.

<sup>36</sup> Franke, E., & Pye, M. (2004). *The study of religions and its contribution to problem-solving in a plural world*. Marburg journal of religion, 9 (2), p. 10-11.

uses, values, and meanings, which is a major component in disseminating religious knowledge and creating a material religion. On the point of the material turn of religion, D. Morgan states that: *Such turns may well present new opportunities for redefining method and evidence, for marshaling the combined efforts of scholars, and for facilitating interdisciplinary connections that preceding discourses may have missed or discouraged*".<sup>37</sup> Besides, the comparative analysis of the study of religion provides an intriguing perspective on this issue, given its clear scientific intention that does not aim to underplay historic and religious differences between communities, but instead provide a clearer understanding of how these groups see themselves and how others apprehend them. This target thus implies that museums should clearly state their intention and firm commitment to mainstream social inclusion and therefore have to establish balance and equality between cultures and identities in their contents and strategies.<sup>38</sup> At long last, the study of religion seeks to provide a critical perspective and a rational attitude without threatening the social responsibility.

The new museology gradually serves to articulate religious identities, provide answers, share common cultures, and reduce issues of distinction. Against this background, a museum of religion seems to be a possible solution to rebuild confidence in others, affect religious communities, and lead to social recognition by integrating religious minorities into society through religious, cultural, and artistic interbreeding. This recognition does not include the discontinuation of existing norms and beliefs, on the contrary, it constitutes a prerequisite that makes other beliefs become truly shared and promotes a cosmopolitan environment. The St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art is an excellent example that interreligious dialogue can significantly improve the recognition and acceptance of religious diversity in society. Its exhibitions open the door for new questioning and explore new religious subjects through juxtaposing the respective rituals of religions. It is important to stress that the juxtaposition of religious objects from different religious faiths may create visual similarities, but this pictorial accordance does not necessarily testify belief similarities.<sup>39</sup> That being said, this is critically important to ensure community harmony because it is by recognizing others' difference and specific particularities that understanding can occur. According to the same line of reason, the founder of religious study as a university subject Friedrich Max Müller said speaking of religion: *"If you know one, you don't know any"*.<sup>40</sup> That is to say that understanding religions

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<sup>37</sup> Morgan 2017, p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> Sandell, R. (Ed.). (2002). *Museums, society, inequality*. Routledge, p. 6-17.

<sup>39</sup> Freudenheim 2017, p.187.

<sup>40</sup> Müller, F. M. (1876). *Einleitung in die vergleichende Religionswissenschaft: vier Vorlesungen im Jahre 1870 an der Royal Institution in London gehalten*. Trübner, p. 14.

start with a preoccupation with all religion, their specific characteristics and mutual references and interrelationships, which is one of the main purposes of my proposal.

### ***State of Research***

Religious life may play a crucial role in assuring political and social stability, which requires substantial need for increased understanding, awareness, and visibility across religious groups. However, the converse is also true; if religions are misunderstood, they lead to conflict and disagreement. Large sums of money are now invested to explore the relation between religious, sociopolitical, and cultural spheres and to engage much more actively with religion, which therefore triggered the “*museumification*” of religion. Museums devoted to religion have boomed throughout the world and managed to solve the issue of sacredness by displaying ritual objects at the edge between an arts-historical and sacred perspective. The best examples of this are the Nicolet Museum of World Religions (rescue museum), the Museum of History of St. Petersburg, and the religious collection of Marburg (scholarly museums), St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art (communities harmony museum), and Taipei's Museum of World Religions (many-routes museum). Moreover, secular museums started organizing their own blockbuster exhibitions to display religious life and arts such as: Sacred Pain at the Indianapolis (2009-10), Treasure of Heaven: Saint, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe (2011) and Hajj: journey to the heart of Islam at the British museum (2012).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, family/children oriented museums placed emphasis on discussing religious matter in their arenas, for example the exposure about world religion “*Geographic Sacred Journey*” organized at the Children Museum of Indianapolis, which aimed at promoting among children awareness and respect for other faiths.

The new museology is increasingly focusing on exploring faiths using religious communities' voices and insights (proactive exposure) to promote diverse interpretations and breakdown monolithic views of religion. The best examples of the new perspective that examines the practice and expression of religious beliefs across the world are the exposures: “*Living with gods: peoples, places and worlds beyond*” at the British Museum, and “*Discover What We Share*” at the British Library. On the other hand, “*Religions of The Book*” at Aan de Stroom museum puts emphasis on displaying only the Abrahamic religions through proactive curating and outsider contribution, which played a large role in attracting visitors to the museum.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Buggeln, G., Paine, C., & Plate, S. B. (Eds.). (2017). *Religion in museums: global and multidisciplinary perspectives*. Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Reeve, J. (2017). *Islam and Museums: Learning and Outreach*. Religion in museums, p. 175.

Furthermore, a new trend of displaying religion has materialised in recent decades and consist of organizing touring interactive exhibitions that feeds on different countries' religious patrimony. Canada and France are the most active countries in proposing itinerant exhibitions centred on religious life, knowing that these exposures have proved impressively efficient in attracting substantial attention from the public. The most successful examples are “*Darshan. Miroirs de l'âme*” and “*L'arche de Noé selon Claude Lafortune*” (Canada) and “*Shared Holy Places*” (France) that toured seven countries, including Tunisia (2016).

More interestingly, some universities, such as the Phillips-Universität Marburg, put an emphasis on religious collection and devoted in 1927 a scholarly Museum of religion (Religionskundliche Sammlung) to explore, reflect, display, and give broad perspective to more than twenty religious traditions worldwide with particular focus on new religious movements.<sup>43</sup> Marburg's collection is a prime example of how important it is to bring to the fore the educational values, meanings, and expressions of religious concepts and practices (intangible), besides emphasizing objects' historical and artistic quality and aesthetic. H. Frick stressed the illustrative purpose and research aspect of the “*Religionskundliche Sammlung*”, which makes it stand apart and gives it the capacity to question, educate, and inform visitors and students about diversity of religion.<sup>44</sup> From 2006 onward, the collection put more focus on tackling current social issue, challenges, and the intersection of religion in society and encouraging active involvement from external contributors who take part in conceiving exhibitions, which are two major components of my reflection about the museum proposal. Grasping religion is widely discussed in the study of religion, which does not deem it as a fixed quantity and a set of phenomenon with universal validity and empirical reality, but rather as a discursive category constantly changing in social negotiation processes.<sup>45</sup> In this context, religious discourses, action, and heritage constitute a field of social identities and deserve to be part of museological research. However, it is important to point out that exhibiting religious objects remains a sensitive topic since it raises difficult issues stemming from religious conviction and often opposes antagonistic visions, as certain interpretations are more accepted than others. Against this background, museums can greatly make expressions and practices visible but also often consign other observances to invisibility, especially when it comes to religious beliefs and

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<sup>43</sup> Runge, K. (2017). *Studying, Teaching, and Exhibiting Religion: The Marburg Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung)*. Religion in museums, p 157.

<sup>44</sup> Frick, H. (1931). *International Institute for the Study of Religion*. Marburg, p. 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> Von Stuckrad, K. (2003). *Discursive study of religion: From states of the mind to communication and action*. Method & Theory in the Study of Religion, 15(3), p 266.

practices.<sup>46</sup> This element represents the core problem of Tunisian museums that only put emphasis on a fossilized way of life and no longer practiced religions (from antique mythology). This stance mirrors Tunisian political will that refrains from dealing with living beliefs and tradition out of fear of ideological confrontation and avoiding actively engaging with religion to diminish the veneration of holy places and relics. Bourguiba deemed the belief in the supernatural and “*superstition*” as a severe impediment that hampers Tunisia’s progress and, consequently, discarded these religious expressions from museum settings. This observation is consistent with the ascertainment that museums centred on religion are “*inherently political enterprises*” that try to locate religion securely in other circumstances (time/ place) and replace it with “*modern aestheticized counterparts*”.<sup>47</sup> However, excluding lived religious cultures from museum settings has so far proven negative in Tunisia and caused ignorance, mistrust, and prejudice against other faiths out of unfamiliarity with these currents.

Exhibitions about religion have huge potential for creating “*transformative experiences*” since it provides concrete and accessible gateways to interpret other ways of thinking or believing.<sup>48</sup> In contrast with this ascertainment, in Tunisia, this potential is not harnessed in a proper manner to positively impact the new generation. Carol Duncan’s book *Civilizing Rituals*,<sup>49</sup> Peter J. Bräunlein’s anthology *Religion und Museum*,<sup>50</sup> Crispin Paine’s book *Religious Objects in Museums*<sup>51</sup> and S. Brent Plate’s anthology *Religion in Museums*<sup>52</sup> provided compelling answers regarding the issue of approaching religion in museums, which expand beyond the culture of prohibition and construct through enlightenment and emancipation a better legibility and clarification of religious matter. These scholars succeeded in making a significant step toward putting a multimedia and multidisciplinary reflection on religion into large-scale museological practice in order to explore new ways of creation and dissemination of religious knowledge, maintaining an object’s aura, performing practices of selecting objects, and developing better strategies of display. It became apparent that the globalized world of today implies a globalization of religion to build bridges between objects and the religious past and create new connections between visitors and their patrimony by blending narrative and sensual approaches to reveal unexpected experiences. Giving museumgoers an immersive experience using

<sup>46</sup> Promey, S. M. (2017). *Foreword: Museums, religion and notions of modernity*. *Religion in Museums*, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p 21.

<sup>48</sup> Carron, C. G., Foutz, S., & Pederson, M. (2017). *Religion in Museums for Families with Children*. *Religion in museums*, p 202-203.

<sup>49</sup> Duncan, C. (2005). *Civilizing rituals: Inside public art museums*. Routledge, p. 389-390.

<sup>50</sup> Bräunlein, P. J. (2004). *Religion und Museum. Zur visuellen Repräsentation von Religion/en im öffentlichen Raum, Bielefeld: Transcript*, p.77-96.

<sup>51</sup> Paine, C. (2013) *Religious Objects in Museums Private Lives and Public Duties*, Routledge, p.1-160.

<sup>52</sup> Buggeln, G., Paine, C., & Plate, S. B. (Eds.) 2017.

interpretive video, panels, history recordings, and individuals' stories has proved to be an effective method of engaging a broader audience because it inspires visitors and affects their personal and emotional aspects.<sup>53</sup> Museums should provide more interpretive signage, guidance, and sensory possibilities (senses) to reveal hidden and lost meaning and construct an additional layer to display religious discrepancies and commonalities.<sup>54</sup> This element was the higher quality of the itinerant exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" (2016) that used three additional powerful sensory agents (vision, hearing touch) to better allow tactile and auditory learning and to smooth the thin the veil between the natural and supernatural worlds. This exposure was highly successful and offered an enriching experience for Tunisian visitors unused to content juxtaposition (images, fluid motion, and rich sound), which rendered the religious expression more visible and the visit highly satisfactory (corresponding details in the empirical survey in chapter III). Speaking of a museum's power, Daniel Buren recognizes its mystical, social, and critical role that cultivates public virtue, regulates practices, offers a forum for dialogue, and serves as a structure to promote acceptance.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the West, a museum's display related to current religions or centred on contemporary religious objects is extremely rare in Tunisian museums. The exhibitions are still stagnant in antiquated and transient approaches that primarily deal with ancient beliefs and use written narrative and superficial explanation in the form of labels, similar to books on walls. Nevertheless, if religions became heterogeneous, then it makes no sense to keep displaying them using a unique support (archaeological display) and not move to the stage of featuring historical, artistic, and sensory contexts. For fear of litigation, Tunisian museums represent a dead-end street for religious heritage due to a simplistic approach that deals neither with current religions nor addresses the cultural changes and religious confluences or tackles religious diversity in order to provide visitors with new views on religious conflicts. Museums display thematically and chronology the religious heritage using predominantly the classical archaeology, which is quite reductive and truncated because it does not deal with the national identity and more importantly requires a large pseudo-knowledge of ancient religion. The approach that emphasises objects' ancient function instead of their symbolic meaning does not fit the profile of contemporary visitors and does not meet their expectations. It does not devise ways of displaying how religious artifacts move in temporality and allow multiple connections

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<sup>53</sup>Magelssen, S. (2007). *Living history museums: Undoing history through performance*. Scarecrow Press, p 36-38.

<sup>54</sup> Nelson 2007, p. 235-237.

<sup>55</sup> Buren, D. (1973). *Fonction du musée*. *Function of the Museum, 1965-1990*, Oxford, p. 173-179

to comprehend them. It does not have the means for evoking the national memory, binding museumgoers with collective belief or stirring their “*religious imagination*”.<sup>56</sup> Such conventional secular-rational perspective is inappropriate to embrace objects’ power, which in devotees’ conception is still charged with supernatural potency.<sup>57</sup> This stalemate could be broken by creating a museum of religion that pays special attention to objects’ interconnection with different contexts and provides more information about their values, semantics, and functions without neglecting their historical aspects.

### ***Research Problem***

In Tunisia, there are different religious currents opposing, affronting each other, and trying to gain more access and control over society and pave a path to politics. Islam is the main official religion with a rate of approximately 98% of the population, whereas Christianity, Judaism, and Baha'ime are recognized as religious minorities.<sup>58</sup> Tunisia is reputed for tolerance, openness, and access to cultural and religious otherness, which is an integral part of its identity, except that the situation changed after the revolution and several acts of violence against non-Muslims occurred. These incidents reflect the mismanagement of the issues of religion in public institutions and the lack of religious culture of a large section of the population due to State inaction and policy failure that attempted to keep the religious otherness and plurality hidden from public view in social, political, cultural, and museum arenas. The core problematic of my research deals with this concern: If museums have proven to be highly efficient in challenging monolithic and polemical perception of religion,<sup>59</sup> then why do Tunisian museums still resist disclosure of religious plurality and multiculturalism, and prevent creating an explicit connection between art and religion? Is it possible to reduce this “*embarrassment*”<sup>60</sup> and discomfort with religious practices of rituals of temporary Western religion in Tunisian museums? Is it not time to no longer disguise religious realities and sensitiveness and instead inform the public about others’ religious perceptions, expressions, and beliefs using also contemporary art? What would happen if these religious currents were be gathered, addressed, and exhibited together in a museum of religion? Would visitors be bothered by the inclusion of other faiths in a museum setting? What effects would such a museum have on Tunisians’

<sup>56</sup> Brown, D. (1999). *Tradition and imagination: Revelation and change*. Clarendon Press. p 4.

<sup>57</sup> Byrne, D. (2014). *Counterheritage: Critical perspectives on heritage conservation in Asia* (Vol. 5). Routledge, p. 70-244.

<sup>58</sup> Grim, B. J., & Hsu, B. (2011). Estimating the global Muslim population: Size and distribution of the world's Muslim population. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, p. 2-19.

<sup>59</sup> Cannadine, D. (2014). *The undivided past: Humanity beyond our differences*. Vintage.p 11-52.

<sup>60</sup> Freudenheim uses the term “embarrassment” to describe the feeling of visitors facing contemporary western religion in art museums. Freudenheim 2017, p. 181.

perception of religious otherness? Above all, how can the museum respond to religions' contradictions and tensions that swirl through the Tunisian society? With which tools would this museum explain religious values, beliefs, and traditions, share religious experiences and build a common history, interlocking and sharing culture in the best way possible? How to create a generative balance of aesthetic values and sacred values that promotes the understanding of the spirituality? How to avoid repeating the same mistakes of museums dealing with religion, as in the case of the Museum of Civilizations and Religions in Hammamet? More importantly, by offering a better understanding of other beliefs, is it possible to lower religious tension, rigidity, fear of others, and build confidence. Finally, is it possible to create a museum of religion in a society rooted in the Muslim-Arab-tradition or is such project doomed to failure?

In the new museology, every religious object and lived experience have to be deemed as "*museum worthy*" to stimulate reflection, deconstruct the essentialist statement of religions, and induce a sense of their unity. Some religions place particular emphasis on beliefs while others focus on action, which requires a well-rounded museum concept to address both aspects. If art museums cannot respond to all these requirements, needs, and challenges and may somehow deracinate religious objects from their spiritual meaning,<sup>61</sup> museums of religion have proved able to bridge the gap between spiritual aspects and aesthetic claims on one hand and between abstract concepts and concrete example on the other.<sup>62</sup> My thesis investigates new methods and approaches to reconcile these gaps, provide tangible encounters with sacred tradition, and spark the interest of Tunisian museumgoers in religion. Displaying religion as living cultures by featuring historic, ethnographic, and modern artistic collections may appear difficult and risky, but it has proved to be effective and a deterrent in Western museums and is definitely worth a try in Tunisia. Concerting a space for shared interdisciplinary knowledge that explores rituals, life, and theological distinctiveness, finding good ways to expand the museum work in different directions, and recontextualizing the understanding of religion in Tunisia constitute the core objective of my research thesis. My aim is not to promote any one religion or approve one faith as "*right*", but rather to trigger some reflection on this highly relevant matter that goes beyond intellectual engagement. It is impossible to teach everything about religion in one museum; however, it would help reduce Tunisians' reluctance to explore other religious cultures. In this

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p 184.

<sup>62</sup> Crispin Paine claims that the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art represent a prime example that meets all requirement. Paine 2017, p. 218.

respect, G. Buggeln contended, “*The public is usually grateful for the opportunity to learn more about religion in the context of a museum visit*”.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Research Structure***

The first chapter of my research draws attention to the conceptual difference between religion and culture, addresses the issue of defining these evolving concepts in different subject fields, and stresses the duality, tension, interaction, and complementarity between them. In a second step, it provides a historical overview of religion in Tunisia from the Paleolithic period until the present day and lays emphasis on its relationship with politics after the independence. The chapter concludes with a look at the religious identities and denotes their position, shift, conflict, and inhibition in society. This chapter is of great importance to conceive a proposal of a museum of religion, because it will allow me to trace the history of religion in Tunisia and its influence on society but also on the behaviour of the individual. The second chapter explores another key component of research and sets out the chronology of museums’ emergence and the evolution of religious exhibitions worldwide with a focus on the Tunisian case. It shows how religion started occupying a growing position in museums and gives a picture of the challenges that have faced the pairing of both agencies. It also points out the Tunisian museums’ crisis in terms of displaying religion and attempts to identify the causes of public disinterest. Based on a personal interview with the Tunisian Minister of Education, this chapter shows the difficulties of teaching children about religion and examines its proposal (reform) to encourage instruction in comparative religion and history of religion. In a second step, it assesses the museums’ reconciliation policy with the educational establishments and proposes a few lasting solutions to come out of this crisis. The end of this chapter tackles the issue of the musealization of religious objects, the concern of sacredness in the museum arena, and tries, through an ethnographical observation carried out at Hammamet Museum of Religion and Civilization, to identify the points of failure in terms of religious display policy and consistency with museological requirement.

Chapter three is an empirical work that reviews and considers a new approach of displaying religion through the juxtaposition of religious objects and the mixing of religious, historical, ethnological, and modern artistic registers. This section explores the trump cards, museographical innovation, and weak spot of the exposure “*Shared Holy Places*” that took place in Bardo museum using a quantitative analysis of 300 Tunisian visitors and a personal

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<sup>63</sup> Buggeln, G. T. (2017). *Conversing with the Past: First-Person Religion Programming at Colonial Williamsburg*. Religion in museums, p. 194.

interview with its curators Manoël Pénicaud. This chapter gives accurate insight into the exhibit's negative and positive points, sensitive areas of display, and, more importantly, gives details of visitors' experience, criticism, and requirement. The exposure that deals with the Abrahamic faiths represents a similar example of what the project of my proposal would be, that is why every detail is of prime importance and usefulness. Chapter Four is a deeply significant part of my reflection because it proposes an architectural, museological, museographic, scenographic, and thematic conception of a museum of religion. Based on the results of the empirical investigation that examines visitors' preferences and requirements in terms of religious display and the ethnographical observation conducted in Hammamet Museum of Religion and Civilization, chapter four gives a workable methodological and practical proposal of a museum of religion in line with scientific requirement of the study of religion and museology.

## I. Religion in Tunisia

### 1. Religion and Culture: A Conceptual Difference

Addressing the question of culture as a form of religion, or vice versa, remains a highly complex matter given the dimensional similarity of both notions. In modern societies, and considering the respite of religious authorities and the weakening of its influence, several anthropological currents have explored the religious dimension of human life without taking into consideration the functional differentiation of its social institutions. The avant-garde perspective argues against the normative definitions of religion and broadens the field of research in terms of extra-institutional religious phenomena. Nonetheless, one issue arises in this context: whether culture comprises all the results of human activity, and whether categorizing religion as one of its forms will consequently make the religious phenomenon a human and social activity and therefore integrates the field of science. Following this approach, the relation religion-culture will be doubly browbeaten by modernity since religion will be reduced to an absolute truth conquered by revelation, which reflects a fideism that makes religion a purely irrational phenomenon. The modern intellectual current accuses theological attachment to old religious vocabulary and disapproves its commitment to religious notions deemed as eternal truths, thus creating a blockage that hinders theology from adapting to new cultures. In return, theology contests the neglect of the religious sphere for the benefit of the cultural sphere and rejects this process of change that generates a sense of confusion, disorientation, and disorder.<sup>64</sup>

Geertz rejects the religion-culture homology and considers that religion should not be seen as culture, it is rather its paradigm, model, and code needed to understand the cultural dimensions of societies. His observation connects religion to systems of symbolic significance that distinguish between cultures using a mechanism of diversification as beliefs, myths, and traditions.<sup>65</sup> Rudolf Bultmann also emphasizes the relation of attachment and connectedness that links the two phenomena and considers that any culture depends on religion despite the duality that confronts them. This duality has clearly manifested itself through history in various attempts of culture to get out of the iron cage of religion and of its empiricism.<sup>66</sup> This crisis lies in the antinomic difference of both concepts because culture's community dimension denies religion's individual dimension, which complicates their coexistence in the same setting. Moreover, the active character of culture as human activity rejects the passive character of

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<sup>64</sup> Paul II, J. O. H. N. (1998). *Fides et ratio*. Origins, 28 (19), p. 50-60.

<sup>65</sup> Geertz, C., & Banton, M. (1966). *Religion as a cultural system*, Tavistock, p 15-28.

<sup>66</sup> Bultman, R. (1987). *Religion und Kultur*, in J. Moltmann *Anfangen der dialektischen Theologie*, Theologie, v II, München, p. 10-25.

religion charged with submission and dependence (transcendence) and extends the tension between both phenomena. For Paul Tillich, the culture falls apart, collapses without religion and becomes a secular reality unable to provide its own authenticity, which explains why the cultural cosmos needs to feed from religion to acquire a high degree of authenticity.<sup>67</sup> He adds that there is no common characteristic between the culture forming “*a question*” and the religion forming “*an answer*”.<sup>68</sup>

If Durkheim and Geertz deemed religion as the founding element and primary symbolic system of culture that is in charge of organizing the social life, the advent of other symbolic systems in modernity altered the order of things and weakened the religion, which has lost its fundamental place, dominance, and stability in the social sphere. Given the surging social unrest in modernity, the variety meaning systems has spoiled the religious phenomena in human thought and caused an overage of significance that has impaired the impact of religion in culture’s social construct. Culture is gradually standing out from the dominance of religious and spiritual precepts and morphing into both social production and consumption of secularized symbols, while religion is still loyal to its commitment to sacred memory that contradict prevailing social norms. This anthropocentric culture, characterized by an individualized approach, subjective belief, and reductive convictions away from transcendence, goes through an overwhelming utilitarianism and pragmatism caused by its speculative dimension. These transformations have not completely managed to repeal religion’s authentic character and sacred tradition and omit it as a legitimating organism. Contrariwise, religion still defends itself from ongoing cultural degradation that categorically refuse the continuity of religious traditions in secular societies. In the face of this wave of deconsecration, religion resists this overflow and refuses to melt in cultural diversity that tries to erase its authenticity and sacredness, wipe its significance, and change it into an artistic, aesthetic, and commercial dimension. Religion indicts the lack of authenticity of modernist and anthropocentric cultures that attempt to seize its eternal, sacred, and divine character. Moreover, it tackles culture in an attempt to redefine its symbols and reallocate its functions by referencing to a previous religious cohesion in which individuals identify themselves mainly to a religious register.<sup>69</sup>

The contemporary approach to this common misconception rejects the theories arguing for a complete autonomy or full distinction between religious and cultural spheres. However, it

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<sup>67</sup> Tillich, P. (2006). *Théologie systématique*, III, trad. André Gounelle, Paris, Cerf, 18. p 86-114.

<sup>68</sup> Tillich, P. (1964). *Die Frage nach Dem Unbedingten Schriften Zur Religionsphilosophie*, p 1-267.

<sup>69</sup> Hervieu-Léger, D. (1993). *La religion pour mémoire*. Éd. du Cerf. p. 117-120.

attests their interbreeding despite their differences in the modern doctrine, which also gather several contradictory notions as science, philosophy, and religiousness. Whichever approach is adopted, culture is not an innate phenomenon or an instinctive congenital behaviour, it is rather an intellectual operation and a participatory process that can be learned. A fine line exists, however, between the anthropological approach based on behaviours' observation and the differential approach of institutions and beliefs.

### 1.1. Culture, a Constantly Evolving Discourse

Culture has aroused the interest of several scientific disciplines such as science of religion, ethnology, anthropology, and psychology, and Kroeber and Kluckhohn counted in 1952 more than 150 definitions.<sup>70</sup> E. B. Tylor considered culture as the preferred instrument of science and the toughest partner of society. He defined it as follow: "*Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society*"<sup>71</sup>. With the slightest interaction with another cultural system, the culture goes through a significant route of transformation called social innovation and, accordingly, influences individuals' behaviour depending on their previous experiences and attitudes.<sup>72</sup> Hofstede claims that culture is a visible, traceable conduct in the beliefs and values that bind people to a territory and compares it with a "*mind's software*" that makes distinction between members of different culture.<sup>73</sup> Hofstede underwent an in-depth examination to the concept of culture and developed the so called "*onion model*", which broke down the culture into different layers (outer, middle, hidden) to get to its core. His concept is very close to Gary R. Weaver's "*iceberg model*" which split the culture into two parts: a visible-external part that contains representative characteristics such as language, history, and literature and an invisible-internal part that contains the cultural codes, moral rule, and values.<sup>74</sup> These pioneering approaches called into question Victor Barnow's perspective that regarded culture as a construct of prevailing social clichés and a stereotyped thinking that has morphed with time into norms and tradition via a process of "*conformity and*

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<sup>70</sup> Kroeber, A. L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952). *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*. Papers. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University, p.181.

<sup>71</sup> Tylor, Edward B. (1871): *Primitive Culture: Research into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custum*. New York: J. P. Putnam's Sons. , vol. 1, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture and organizations*. International studies of management & organization, 10(4), p 15–40.

<sup>73</sup> Hofstede, G. H. (1987). *Les différences culturelles dans le management: comment chaque pays gère-t-il ses hommes?* Éditions d'organisation, p.27.

<sup>74</sup> Weaver, G. R. (1986). *Understanding and coping with cross-cultural adjustment stress*, Cross Cultural Orientation. New Conceptualizations and Applications, ed. RM Paige. *RM Paige, Lanham*, p. 177-194.

*imitation*".<sup>75</sup> Although these schools of thought disagree in the matter of source of culture's implicit and explicit models that can be performed either bequeathed (Victor Barnow) or accumulated (Hofstede, Weaver), they both place great emphasis on these models' significance in determining the beliefs, assumptions, and associated practices affecting feelings and shaping attitudes and building intellectual and identity construction.

It should be pointed out that the concept of culture has always been closely interrelated with the issue of religion, and this junction has generated a power struggle between them aimed at dominating the social partners' thinking. People's perceptions were previously driven by religious line and charged with spirituality, however, as time passed, it falls deeper in the avant-gardist character of modernity. It is becoming increasingly evident that there is an alarming identity disorder in most modern societies caused by a growing divorce between religious institutions and social beings due to culture's reappropriation of the social sphere. Even though religious expression and activities are relentlessly regressing, religion is still carrying weight in social and political organization. Nonetheless, its expression, meanings, and symbolic function have changed with the culture of enlightenment and the "*secularization theory of modernity*", which triggered a misconception of religion in common thought. José Casanova speaks even of a global process of "de-privatization" of religion that affected the entire world and the fusion of the various institutional spheres, particularly in Western European societies.<sup>76</sup> Casanova claims that the decline of religion became an empirical fact that started with the world-historical process of globalization initiated in Europe and continued despite the influx of new immigrant religions.<sup>77</sup> The theory of privatization of religion has been heavily criticized by Tatal Asad, who deems 'the secular' as a significant part of a theological discourse and "the religious" as shaped by secular political and scientific discourses, which made from it a construction of Western secular modernity.<sup>78</sup> This ambiguity raises several questions: What is a religious phenomenon? Is it possible to give a definition for religion valid for all beliefs? Can defining religion reduce this conceptual confusion and pin down its social space?

### 1.2. Theories of Religion

The diversity and complexity of this challenging concept bring into play common threads and bonds making it difficult, if not impossible, to spot a comprehensive definition to religion.

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<sup>75</sup> Victor, B. (1963). *Culture and Personality*, the Dorsey Press, Inc.1, Ed, p. 1-410.

<sup>76</sup> Casanova, J. (2011). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press, p. 3-39.

<sup>77</sup> Casanova, J. (2007). *Die religiöse Lage in Europa*, w: Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen, Hrsg. von H. Joas, K. Wiegandt, Frankfurt am Main, p. 342-343.

<sup>78</sup> Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford University Press. p. 192.

Facing a cultural adversity, this complex and multifaceted phenomenon has for a long time impelled human thinking and awakened interest, curiosity, and concerns about human life.<sup>79</sup> Several social sciences such as sciences of religion, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology have explored religion for its functional and symbolic value and its significant impact in the social sphere. The diversity of religions' functions, practices, and changes throughout history make it incredibly difficult to delineate such concepts. Religion goes through various mutations and require a constantly enhanced review to its functions and significance by using a dynamic approach that takes into account any changes affecting its sphere and rejects weak and thoughtless ascertainment of dogmatism. It should, however, be borne in mind that each ascertainment should not be considered a final finding since although a disciplinary field bases its assertion on a scientific nature, each analysis remains provisional and each approach can be reviewed. The question here is whether religion is doubly, idiomatically, and theoretically, indefinable. I intend at this point to confine myself to tackle religion as an observable phenomenon and identify its function in society to improve its understanding in a different direction. The aim of my section is not to establish a unique and straightforward definition to religion but rather to draw attention to its expressional variety and multiform reality, which are a considerable asset in a museum of religion. In order to achieve this aim, my analysis will make use of the studies of religion perspective, given its doubly theoretical and normative angle, that explores religion's embedding significant incorporation with other phenomena in terms of symbolic significance and blend it with cultural, social, and political dimensions.

Terminologically, the declination of the term Religion varies according to the researcher, specialty, and the field of study. There is the sociology of religion, religious history/history of religion, religious psychology/psychology of religion, religious anthropology, and "Religionwissenschaft". In 1845, the term "sacred science" took shape and changed quickly into "science of religion" with Max Müller in his work entitled *Essays on the Science of Religion*.<sup>80</sup> The multidisciplinary approach of the studies of religion gave a particular interest among religious features, given its overwhelming emphasis on related concerns, shifts, and evolution, and not on devising a definition for it. It would be improper to tackle religious phenomena (peculiarities) in the same way as social phenomena because it is irrelevant to apprehend in a single row all human expression in their distinctiveness and singular dimensions.

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<sup>79</sup> Linton, R. E. (1945). *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, Columbia University Press, p. 400-532.

<sup>80</sup> Müller, F. M. (1869) *Essays on the science of religion*, chips from a German Workshop, C. Scribner, Cornell University, p 1-337.

It is more appropriate to identify, trace, list, and compare religious phenomena with similar or different expression through an in-depth analysis in terms of relationships, concordance, or conflicts. Through a comparative approach, the stakes of the studies of religion revolve around the following point: identify the social and individual character of religion, the validity of religious phenomena, the cut-off point between normality and abnormality of religious life, and forms of religious experience and expression. This approach promotes better analytical and comparative study of religious expressions being a living aspect embodied in societies rather than a distorted polemic factor. The consistency, embedded value, and distinguishing feature of the studies of religion lie in the acknowledgement of religion's multiple definitions and attributes, which provide a substantial diversity of view and a broad degree of complementarity that help to clarify the complexity of ambiguity of this phenomenon difficult to define.<sup>81</sup>

From a philosophical standpoint, Tillich listed the approaches that addressed religion into three philosophical axes: the first current binds the human being with the absolute (Thomas Aquinas), the second categorizes it with an irrational field (Friedrich Schleiermacher), and a third regards it as a primitive state of knowledge (Marx, Engels, Hegel, and Weber). Casting a critical eye over the process of defining religion, John Dewey, marked by the instrumentalist thought, claims that the single term "religion" has no meaning when used reclusive because it does not simultaneously fulfil all existing religions. Dewey stated that a clear distinction should be made between religious life, religious experience, and religion as a belief and that reducing religion to supernatural strengths is an outdated conception forsaken in modern societies.<sup>82</sup> Several philosophers who have labelled it as an unconscious submission has defended this critical stance toward subjugation to religion and illusion of supernatural strength and transcendence. For instance, Feuerbach argued against religion and deemed it as a split, if not a sign of alienation that curtails flexibility, creativity, and freedom of social being.<sup>83</sup> Marx criticizes religion and its anaesthetic effect on the collective mindset that paralyzes procreation of a socialist environment and human ingenuity. The French philosopher Henri Bergson, who is influenced by Herbert Spencer thinking, spoke against the sociological approaches of Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim to religion and morality and stressed their entailment in maintaining societies and creating a new humanity. He considered that their approaches are inserted in a typically sociological perspective and particular historical context (secular project) that gives

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<sup>81</sup> Azria, R., & Saint-Blancat, C. (2010). *Diaspora*. Azria R. & Hervieu-Léger D., *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, Paris, PUF p 7.

<sup>82</sup> Dewey, J. (2013). *A common faith*. Yale University Press. p. 5-32.

<sup>83</sup> Feuerbach, L. (1994). *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Stuttgart, p.10-90.

importance to the institutions and compromises religion's psychological or philosophical dimension. Bergson has proposed a new categorization for the religious phenomenon: moral obligation, static religion, dynamic religion, and mystical experience in order to gain a thorough understanding of its dimensions. He claims that religion is a vital and indispensable stepping-stone in every human society, and that it is likely for a society to subsist without science, art, and philosophy, but never without religion.<sup>84</sup> Bergson's standpoint got a lot of criticism, mainly from Vieillard-Baron, who considers the concept of "new humanity" fictional, slender, and a limited set, which casts doubt on Bergson's approach to religion and morality.

From an ethical and anthropological standpoint, Malinowski considered that the sacred and profane are two ubiquitous elements in all human societies that, in coalition with the science, form the basis of every civilization.<sup>85</sup> James Frazer who claimed the possibility of having a social existence without religion by using human intelligence has repulsed this vision that put great value on religious forbidden aspects (taboo). Frazer submit that the human intellect has boosted modern societies and contributes to their advancement and development by shrinking the entailment of magic and religion.<sup>86</sup> L. Wittgenstein rated this ascertainment deficient because it base its argument on amorphous thinking full of prejudice, ideological conjecture, and impertinent methodology.<sup>87</sup> In anthropology, there is a need to dissociate religion from transcendence to gain better understanding of its mechanisms and ensure better analysis to its meanings and symbols.<sup>88</sup> Clifford Geertz saw in the system of symbols the core basis of religion, that is why he put a great emphasis on its relation to other phenomena having other systems of symbols. He noted, "*Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*"<sup>89</sup> What is striking in the definition of Geertz and deserves to be mentioned is that it does not contain any indication to supernatural beings or gods, which means that Geertz does not consider these aspects in the baseline of religion. In the light of its complexity, religion was oft assimilated to analogous phenomena such as art, science, and morals, which is an overly simplistic and erroneous view

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<sup>84</sup> Bergson, H. (2012). *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. Flammarion. p 105.

<sup>85</sup> Nader, L. (1996). *Magic, Science, and Religion Revisited*. Naked science: Anthropological inquiry into boundaries, power, and knowledge, p 259.

<sup>86</sup> Frazer, J. G. (1903). *Le rameau d'or: étude sur la magie et la religion*. Schleicher, p.74-75.

<sup>87</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (1977). *Remarques sur " Le Rameau d'or" de Frazer*. Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, 16 (1), p. 37-42

<sup>88</sup> Goodenough, W. H. (1974). *Toward an anthropologically useful definition of religion*. Changing perspectives in the scientific study of religion, p. 166-168.

<sup>89</sup> Geertz & Banton 1966, p 90.

that shows a lack of relevance. Contrariwise, religion has distinct structural realities, operates differently and contrary to other arenas, entails involvement in any civil, social (aspects of hierarchy), or political (government techniques) structure.<sup>90</sup> It should be remembered that the anthropological approach to the definition of religion evolves, shifts, and gains other dimensions. Karl Marx first defined religion as a glint of an accomplished being, and then equated it with the real world and deemed it as the end as an ideology of social being.

From a sociological standpoint, most of definitions reflect an influence with Durkheim's work *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Durkheim defined religion as: "a solid system of beliefs and practices having to do with the sacred, that is to say, the separated, the prohibited, the beliefs and practices which are bound up in a moral community called the Church, and all that appertains thereto."<sup>91</sup> Religion is then a human reality before being linked to a supra-human or divinity. For this reason, it is more appropriate to seek religion within the human sphere before tackling Gods' sphere. This process implies a distinction between the "sacred" and profane because this separation would improve the discernment of the religious sphere and the perception of its symbols and aspects. Durkheim's approach assumes that the "sacred" encloses an exclusive feeling embodying a particular emotion charged with fear and not with submission.<sup>92</sup> This sense of fear and suspicion boosts the social beings' commitment to divinities' strengths and objects and maintain in place the collective symbols and values. The conjecture of "sacred" feelings and social correlate factors can be associated with the distinction between the values and realities in modern societies. Durkheim pinpointed religion at the heart of society, contrary to Weber who sought to identify society behind religion as part of an angle to access the social' dimension.<sup>93</sup> Durkheim has put a focus on religion's subjective and objective aspects to be able apprehend it correctly, which does not only involve community and individuals' distinct beliefs but also include the collective practices as rituals and traditions. Sociologists such as Robertson and Dobbelaere have addressed religion subjectively as "sacred reality" and put particular emphasis on its transcendent dimension (sacred reality), whereas others such as Yinger and Luckmann approached it functionally as a sociable insertion system that regularizes social settings and aligns the meaning ascribed to it.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Mandelbaum, D. G. (1949). *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language*. Culture, p. 355-359.

<sup>91</sup> Durkheim 2013, p 65.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p 87.

<sup>93</sup> Weber, M. (1974). *Économie et Société* (trad.), Paris, Plon, 1971. sq. Cf. BS Turner, Weber and Islam: a critical Study, Londres, Routledge and K. Paul, p. 579.

<sup>94</sup> Robertson, R. (1970). *The sociological interpretation of religion*. Blackwell, p. 433- 477.

In sociology of religion, religion represented a contentious issue and a fundamental stake to ponder the possibilities of tackling it as a social system. The unspecified pattern, social ambiguity, and mystical aspects of religion generate a considerable conceptual confusion and misinterpretations triggered by the intangibility of its grounds and attributes and the absence of any reference to its essence. Then a question arises: Is it possible to regard religion as a social institution? Answering to this concern, Ruth Benedict clearly underlined in her works on cultural and social systematization that there is an interaction of religion's characteristics with the human existence, which enables religion to fall under the category of social institutions.<sup>95</sup> However, it remains a weak and ailing institution given its deprivation of biological bases.<sup>96</sup> The assessment of sociology of religion that basically knock the spontaneous expressions and meta-social experiences has been at odds with religion, if not in contention with its conceptualization, since it is often assimilated to an instinctive behaviour and finished life code that draws on a predictive baseline system. The sociology of religion spoke out against approaching religion as a vision of social reality that limits its scope of concern and social particularism to divine dimensions. However, over time, the sociological scope of religion has evolved out of the influence of the evolutionist patterns of linear philosophies and has integrated the symbolic phenomena into the analysis of the social context. It is interesting to note the fact that the sociology of religion draws attention to the inaccurate understanding of the issue of religion that is often conflated with similar notions such as citizenry, ethnicity, or culture. On the grounds of misconception of religious characteristics, it is quite common for people to associate religion with some nations and ethnicities, which is fundamentally wrong. This misconception is distinctly common in Tunisia (Arabity/Islam) since there are Arab Jews, Arab Christians, and Arab Bahait and their Arabity does not impliedly mean their adherence to Islam.

In psychology, the conceptualization of religion was not a priority issue, but it was only a matter of time before placing it at the heart of its priorities. Religion is a subject of psychology because it cannot occur without a human psychological functioning. Psychological schools responded differently to the concern of religion, which has issued a number of different opinions regarding this challenging topic. The precursors of the psychology of religion William James and Stanley Hall were the first interested in exploring religion's impact on individuals' personality and psychological behaviour.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, their insight was harshly criticized and impeached of

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<sup>95</sup> Benedict, R. (1938). *Religion in Boas*, F. General Anthropology. New York, p. 625-630.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Vande Kemp, H. (1992). G. *Stanley Hall and the Clark school of religious psychology*. American Psychologist, 47(2), p. 295-297.

overriding other disciplines (philosophy and theology) in terms of scientific assessment by addressing religion largely from a cultural standpoint.<sup>98</sup> Freud had a markedly different picture of religion; he criticized and confined it to a source of consolation by failure, a softening of life's harshness, and a restitution of destiny that is often hurtful.<sup>99</sup> This Psychoanalysis saws in religion an illusion, if not an obstacle, that triggers feelings of unreality and causes social repression and withdrawal made by instinctual drives. This contagious illusory belief rules the human thought in the form of an obsession or a "neurosis" similar to childish compulsion that bedevil good understanding and boosts interpersonal and interfamilial conflict during puberty.<sup>100</sup>

The stance that regards religion as a psychological fallacy or even as pathological obsession caused by human naivety and impotence has been soundly repulsed by several psychoanalysts such as Erich Fromm. In his book *Psychoanalysis and religion*, E. Fromm claims that there is no harm in having belief and no obstacle in having religious persuasion and refused to assimilate religion to a psychological disorder and setback, because it is an extremely stringent view, if not restrictive. He added that Freud's ascertainment and comparison point reflects an excessively narrow approach that strictly deems religious expression as a threat.<sup>101</sup> This same issue is to be found in the writing of H. C. Rümke but in the opposite direction, since he claimed that non-belief is actually the unhealthy mindset and, even more, he considered that non-believers are affected with mental disorders that hamper the development of their personalities, skills, self- and life-perception.<sup>102</sup> This approach was challenged on the basis that disbelief does not intervene in matters of personality disorders and atheists can also suffers from personality disturbance. Religion should be approached differently for the simple reason that it is a subject of theoretical psychology in a distanced meaning. Thus, the prudent course is to deliver a clear description to religion instead of producing a precise or common definition, given its elusive and indefinable appearance.<sup>103</sup> This is done by setting a conceptual distinction between religions as a passive attitude (classic way of living) and "irreligion" as an active attitude (new way of living). Such an approach that promotes an in-depth description to religion is highly preferred in the history and philosophy of religion because it is more conducive to provide an

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<sup>98</sup> Belzen, J. A., & Hood, R. W. (2006). *Methodological issues in the psychology of religion: Toward another paradigm?* The Journal of Psychology, 140 (1) p. 5-14.

<sup>99</sup> Freud, S. (1930) *le Malaise dans la civilisation*, Contemporary French Fiction (1. Januar 2010) p.16.

<sup>100</sup> Freud, S. (1971). *The future of an illusion* (1927). Part VII. Relations between civilization and religion. 61-62.

<sup>101</sup> Fromm, E. (1950). *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, New Haven (Yale University Press), p. 29-30

<sup>102</sup> Van Belzen, J. A. (1985). *Psychologische Theorieentwicklung über das Verhältnis zwischen geistlicher Gesundheit und Religion*. Archive for the Psychology of Religion, 17(1), p. 192-201.

<sup>103</sup> Leuba, J. H. (1912). *A psychological study of religion: Its origin, function, and future*. Macmillan, p 354-355

objective and relevant description to complex phenomena instead of giving a subjective, limited, and forsaken definition at a certain point.<sup>104</sup> Thus, religion was qualified as a phenomenon that draws its strength from an awareness in supernatural presence and entails compliance with practices using reconciliation rituals, which are carried out directly or through intermediate mediation (holiness).<sup>105</sup> This mindset and consideration often morphs into fear and reflects uncertainty, powerlessness, and dependency in front of the unknown.<sup>106</sup> This religious reliance is a product of an interaction with the mystery that often triggers a fear of reality and a submission to the divine.

In this connection, many scholars added value to the duality of freedom-submission that alternate the sacred and profane in different ways. Rudolf Otto, author of *Das Heilige*, a fundamental work in the philosophy of religion, argued against Kant's reductionism and curtailment of religion to just morality and regularity. For Otto, religion includes two fundamental aspects: a rationality embodied in the conception of philosophical notions and an irrationality mirrored in its character that goes beyond reason. He considers that the unknown divine (Numinosum) provides the irrationality, which forms the essence of religion. This divine power is dually noticeable either directly in religious experiences or indirectly through religious expression and sacredness manifested in the form of rites, signs, or symbols.<sup>107</sup> Otto put great emphasis on two key points: religion cannot be explained by the experience of mystery because the meaning of sacrum (sensus numinus) exceeds the numinous (Numinosum) in terms of irrationality. This fact causes the polarity of mystery (mysterium) that attracts and fascinates on one hand (fascinans) and repels on the other (tremendum). This dichotomy reflects religion's distinctive aspect which make this phenomenon incomparable to other life spheres because it provokes concurrently a complementary and adversarial emotion (love and fear) close to divine and mystery's duality. In the same vein, Eliade placed the notion of "sacred" at the heart of the religious experience and classed all the manifestations of the "sacrum" as hierophanies in which the unchangeable eternal interferes with a changeable terrestrial.<sup>108</sup> He claims that the religious thought is primarily based on a distinction between the domains of sacred and profane. This distinction requires a reconsideration of notions based on an eternal reality revealed through

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<sup>104</sup> Goblet d'Alviella, E. (1887). *Introduction à l'histoire générale des religions*, Bruxelles, p. 1-185

<sup>105</sup> Goblet D'Alviella, E. (1911). *Croyances, rites, institutions/1* Archéologie et histoire religieuse. Hiérogaphie. Geuthner, University of Michigan, p. 10-71.

<sup>106</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952). *Structure and function*. London: Cohen and West, p. 157-158.

<sup>107</sup> Otto, R. (1969). *Le sacré: l'élément non-rationnel dans l'idée du divin et sa relation avec le rationnel*, traduction française par André Jundt, Payot, p. 218.

<sup>108</sup> Eliade, M. (1987). *Le Sacré et le Profane*, folio essais, Gallimard, p 20-22.

words, gestures, and symbols because a mutable nature characterizes each religion.<sup>109</sup> Religion holds a dual position; it fulfils an individual integration, a theory propounded by William James and G. W. Allport, but also ensures a collective integration (Durkheim) in providing strong linkage between individuals and ensuring social cohesion. The importance of this phenomenon does not necessarily imply to provide a definition that is almost impossible to make, but rather produces a detailed exploration of its evolution.

### 1.3. Issue of Delineating Religion

The notion of religion has a blurry anthropological vocation and a patchy character that often weeds out the unrecognized forms of beliefs and practices. This intangible social construction is not a fixed reality because it is constantly changing and evolving, which means that producing a sustainable definition will be a process that lacks in scientificity.<sup>110</sup> Given the non-conformity of the concept of religion in the multiple cultural contexts, it is not judicious to construct a uniform definition that does not fit all the religious expressions and does not apply to all living religions. In spite of that, many disciplinary fields have tried to define it using different approaches and from various perspectives. It is possible to rank this set of definitions into two broad categories: The first category of definitions is substantial and aims to identify religion in its essence and the second is functional because it addresses religion's requirements and productions. One very important issue is that functional definitions tend to persist throughout the development of the phenomenon because they focus on its social functions and take heed of its new mutation (surrogate/implicit/diffuse/vicarious). Unlike the substantive definitions that run the risk of becoming impugnable and disappear with time given the connection with supernatural dimensions, which arose a lot of criticism. Producing a pragmatic definition of religion encompasses a process of knowledge that should distinguish between nominal definition (general reading) inducted in usual language of communication and scientific definition (specification and clarification) when used in a field of knowledge.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, establishing a full and unified definition of religion blocks the elucidation of the phenomenon, however, exploring it expands the field of vision and minimizes distortions thanks to demanding research endeavours. This process has adverse effects because it disables the precious asset of a steady progress as scientific research and imagination and confines the scope of exploration and empirical research. The powerful boost of science has further complicated the wording of

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<sup>109</sup> Eliade, M. (1958). *Patterns in comparative religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, p 1-9.

<sup>110</sup> Beckford, J. A. (2003). *Social theory and religion*. Cambridge University Press. P. 1-10.

<sup>111</sup> Spiro, M. E. (1966). *Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation*-In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. M. Banton, ed. New York: Frederick A., p. 85-126.

a clear delineation to religion because this conceptualization would not deploy a suitable methodological and theoretical synthesis.<sup>112</sup> In the modern age, relativistic constraint introduced a deep crisis to this concern and marked the beginning of the phasing out of definitions in general.<sup>113</sup> Against this background, Michael Stausberg calls for a consolidation of various theories of religion in order to make the complexity of religion clear and intelligible on a theoretical level.<sup>114</sup>

The conceptualization of religion poses a daunting problem for human sciences but especially for the sociology of religion, given the complexity of its theories. Shmuel Trigano proposes a new approach of addressing religion that discards the terms related to scarcity and spiritual emotion and puts great emphasis on the models of otherness to properly explore religion as "full" and not as a "void".<sup>115</sup> This ascertainment speaks against the traditional approach of religion strongly centred on religious institutions (Durkheim) and replaces it with an advanced vision based on "*religious modernity*". The shift that has afflicted the religious scene (decentralization/isolation/abandonment) has also stricken the predefined delineation of religion, which consequently became invalid and unusable after losing their validity and predominance. Would the solution be to give an overall or a common definition? Quite the contrary, it would be detrimental to the concept because generalizing the approach usually leads to a potential source of errors that misinterpret the empirical reality which constitute the final base of induction. Broadening too much the field of definition deprives the term from its specific aspect but also does not fulfil the requirement of empirical research. In doing so, this approach would produce an ideal-typical delineating that draws on an inaccurate interpretation and excludes a section of the intellectual and interpretative references required in every scientific research. In his book entitled *Definition* that draw up a properly substantiated analysis of complex fact, R. Robinson claims that concept's generalization will lead to more loss of scientificity than gains in scientific understanding of notions.<sup>116</sup> It is then more accurate to produce a variable and purposive definition that take into consideration the historical and widespread aspects of religion instead of giving a general or stagnant definition maladjusted to modern reasoning.<sup>117</sup> The issue is whether it is necessary to define religion to apprehend it. Delineating religion does not constitute an essential process or a prerequisite to explore its

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<sup>112</sup> Lenclud, G. (1995). *L'illusion essentialiste*. Pourquoi il n'est pas possible de définir les concepts anthropologiques. *Ethnographie* (Paris. 1913), 91(117), p. 145-160.

<sup>113</sup> Dubuisson, D. (1998). *L'Occident et la religion: Mythes, science et idéologie*. Éditions Complexe, p 10-71.

<sup>114</sup> Stausberg, M. (Ed.). (2012). *Religionswissenschaft*. Walter de Gruyter, p 45.

<sup>115</sup> Trigano, S. (2001). *Qu'est-ce que la religion?: la transcendance des sociologues*. Flammarion. p .280-300.

<sup>116</sup> Robinson, R. (1950). *Definition*, Londres, Oxford University Press, p 101.

<sup>117</sup> Bréchon, P., & Duriez, B. (2000). *Religion et action dans l'espace public*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 299.

dimension. Even more serious, it may implicitly conceal the key logic in the thought process needed to analyse, describe, and compare religious phenomena. There is an even larger problem looming because this operation would block out, segregate, and deplete the fundamental meaning of religion on ground of a circular logic that could be reviewed accordingly. Diving into the world of defining religion is a decidedly risky operation that requires a cautious stance going beyond the lexicon issue to ensure a consistency of terminology and reliability of terms used in this definition. The problem runs deeper than that because it requires giving a definition for the process “*definition*” before applying it to a notion.<sup>118</sup>

Notwithstanding the complexity of this matter, the conceptualization of religion remains a possible process that has its pros and cons. It demands an adequate scientific reasoning on how to include the definition in the process of knowledge. The plurality of religion definitions and steady attempts of exploring its dimensions using different approaches gives an indication of its change, shift, and adjustment with other phenomena. With the passing of time, new deciding factors are emerging in modern societies to fit into the rapid development of scientific knowledge, which triggered the institutional disagreement, subjectivism, and individualism. These new social parameters created fortunate circumstances and unique contingencies to reconsider the existential approach, and has consequently wiped out religion as reference frame, model of integration, and socialization, which left in its wake a culture deemed as the new religion of modernity. As a direct result of this ascendancy, religious concepts have blended with some cultural notions, which further complicated the distinction between religious register and cultural register. For example, it has become difficult to know whether the term Hindu, Christian, or Jewish designates a cultural identity or religious belief and whether religious currents such as Islamic fundamentalism define a conservative religious movement, a sect, or a cultural and identity belonging. In the face of mounting disbelief and attenuation of religious authorities, religion is dimming and losing its relevance, validity, potency, and purpose, while a different exclusive religiosity grows in forms of sects winning acclaim in different societies. The individual autonomy, democracy, and plurality have considerably reduced religion’s ascendancy that became a limited spiritual and ethic resource. S. Acquaviva goes deeper in his analysis and speaks of a religious eclipse aligning with a forced retreat of religious feeling to the private sphere, which is mainly related to industrialization and urbanization.<sup>119</sup> Religion found itself forced to mingle with the mass of culture and attempts to break away from its

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<sup>118</sup> Lenclud 1995, p 147-166.

<sup>119</sup> Acquaviva, S. S. (1967). *Sabino S. Acquaviva. L’Éclipse du sacré dans la civilisation industrielle: " l’Eclissi del sacro nella civiltà industriale"*. Traduit de l’italien par M. l’abbé L. Lambert Bovy. Mame, p. 5-18.

overpowering grip by redefining its social and linguistic mechanisms to adapt to the ongoing global context. This adjustment does not mean to stamp out religion but rather unleash the human potential to provide a wider space for independent thinking, reflection, and scientific interpretations. The downturn of religion for the benefit of the “*social*”, science, art, and, most importantly, culture does not mean its collapse or demise but rather the beginning of a new wrestling match between these systems of meaning, as Freud claimed in his work *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, human beings will always need a religious sedative.<sup>120</sup>

The conceptual bewilderment and more importantly the social regression hitting the fundamentals of religion raise concern and provoke questioning about the future of institutional religion in societies becoming increasingly uneven and secularized. How could religion be immersed by culture?

#### **1.4. The Hierarchical Reversal of Culture Over Religion**

My aim in this analysis is not to provide the exact likelihood functions of culture and religion but rather to dismantle the complexity of their relations with a focus on their social bonds to demonstrate the degree of their influence in today's reality, which is a necessary part of my reflection. In this section, I will explore the prioritization of culture over religion to achieve better understanding of their respective positions in the social sphere. Religion is an important component of culture, which encompasses all the results of human activity, including dispositions and habits acquired in the society.<sup>121</sup> However, it represents with the culture two powerful features that derive their cogency from a semiotic process and draws on various matrices of symbolic meaning systems. These key references condition the social reality that stems from human experience lived in a shared space called ethos. In this ambiguous space, the likeness of their semiotic process introduces a degree of confusion into the experience, as well as apprehension. Considering it cultural or religious varies according to individuals' perception and to symbols' organization.

Whether cultural or religious, each system places distinctive normative standards and criteria to ascertain the kind of reality it provides. For Y. Lotman, a prominent semiotician and cultural historian, the organization of the system of meaning does not constitute a personal or group selection but rather hinges on a collective convergence of meanings produced by multiple

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<sup>120</sup> Freud 1930, p 16 (French edition).

<sup>121</sup> Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and custom* (Vol. 2). J. Murray, p.1-375.

symbolic systems.<sup>122</sup>In the face of constant shrinking of the weight of the religious institution in society, modern intellectual thought gives precedence to culture over religion, owing to the ongoing substantial shift and “*semiotization*” of cultural factors. The plot twist that marks modernity has triggered a subservience of religion due to the enfeeblement of religious experience in human consciousness and the decline of the fear of the unknown. Along with the shift, the categorical distinction between religious and cultural (ideals) has lost its smooth consistency because of a disorganization of thought that often conflates these different types of manifestations. It has become evident that the religious ideal is no longer the single controller of the mechanisms organizing the inter-social relations and no longer the sole producer of authentic human truth. The new mechanics generated by modern culture have cut off the links with static and immutable concepts by questioning the truth of religious ideals and by imprisoning the religious experience between the walls of secular culture.

Another tipping point to underline in this social upheaval is that the ranking of phenomena (cultural or religious) depends on an individual’s angle of vision, ideology, and social environment. People often perceive their own belief as a paramount truth and deem other divergent beliefs as inauthentic. Drawing on a limited and feeble truth, this thought system matches automatically every symbolic system, similar to the personal conviction of the person in the range of culture, contrary to the different symbolic systems incongruent with familiar reality, which are going to be ascertained as religious. A current example of this thought system occurs in museums since it is current that productions of religious art find themselves rated as cultural production when the used register resembles the viewer’s symbolic systems. For instance, western artistic reference and museological discourse often rank some religious objects in the range of Islamic cultural production instead of religious art just because they hold an ethnological value of truth, and vice versa. This selection criteria and categorization scheme are heavily charged with a cultural dominance, which makes the dissemination, transference, and communication between heterogeneous symbolic systems highly complex, if not unattainable. All this indicates that the semiotic dimension of culture has gained an aspect of rationality capable of concealing the religious dimension. In other terms, modernity has torn the religious layer of transcendence and transformed it through rationality and power transmission into intentional, artistic, ethnic, and social transcendence.<sup>123</sup> It should likewise be underlined that culture has, as much as religion, an exclusive character that assigns a mental

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<sup>122</sup> Lotman, Y. (1966). *La sémiotique*, translated from Russian by A. Ledenko, Limoges, Presses universitaires de Limoges, coll. « Nouveaux Actes Sémiotiques », 1999, p 22-26.

<sup>123</sup> Levinas, E. (1982). *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*. Librairie philosophique, J. Vrin, Paris, p. 1-271.

disorder or religious "brainwashing" to groups and persons who recede from cultural perception and reasoning.<sup>124</sup> Could this withdrawal be explained by a misinterpretation of truth's semiotic particularity or by a priority competition between religion and culture?

Whether religious, spiritual, or cultural, each symbolic system relentlessly seeks to gain a prevailing stance and command line in society to practice its potency and ethos. Nonetheless, in the modern epoch, the consumer, pop, and scientific cultures have predominated individuals' psyche, spirituality, and inherited and acquired convictions to overwrite the religious character of traditional society. This ascertainment can be explained by the fact that culture as a human acquisition has a more stable character and less prohibitions than religion. Günter Kehrler goes slightly deeper and compares religion with a deceptive sedative that draws on a set of rules unnecessary for society.<sup>125</sup> Modern relativistic culture, clothed with the robe of steadiness, has increased in importance in the last decades, became able to influence individuals' basic choices, lifestyle, and even beliefs, and makes from persons the revealers of their own religion, a religion lacking in religiosity. The question that arises is whether secularization is the causal agent of this shift. Bryan Wilson answers this question and claims that "*this diminution of the role of religion is an evidence not of secularization but of religion's being purged of extraneous social involvement which were, at best, a distraction from religion's true purpose and, at worst, a corruption of the spirit of the world*".<sup>126</sup>

That being said, religion may also be an agency of secularization that regulates, reconfigures and reduces its functioning to be able to persist. In some countries, such as the United States of America, the religious practice has become a compelling secular value and caused a loss of religious bearings and an attenuation of churches.<sup>127</sup> This socio-structural secularization has an evolving and dynamic character that has gone beyond the demise of religious references in literature, art, and philosophy and morphed into a consciousness secularization nourished by rationalization, privatization, and pluralization.<sup>128</sup> Many sociologists, such as Steve Bruce, have criticized this approach as being too secular by putting religion in a contradiction to rationality, which is senseless for the reason that religions embody rationality. For Bruce, plurality is not

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<sup>124</sup> Shelton, K. B. (2016). *La religion et la culture à l'épreuve de la sémiosphère : élucidation d'un faux dilemme* », translated to English by K. Chagnon, S. Levesque & K. B. Shelton, *Cygne noir*, no 4, p.163-192.

<sup>125</sup> Kehrler, G. (2019). *Religionssoziologie* (Vol. 1228). Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG., p. 18-84

<sup>126</sup> Wilson, B. (1985). *The sacred in a secular age: toward revision in the scientific study of religion*. Univ of California Press. p 15.

<sup>127</sup> Wilson, B. R. (1966). *Religion In Secular Society*, Penguin Books, p. 114-126

<sup>128</sup> Séguy, J. (1971). *La Religion dans la conscience moderne*, religion et science de l'homme, p. 175.

necessarily a degradation factor or competitive element for religion; it is also a vector of religious vitality.<sup>129</sup>

This is particularly relevant to my reflection, because showing the Tunisian plurality in a museum would not harm the Islamic identity, quite the contrary; it would create a new social dynamism and promote as a matter of urgency the cultural and religious acceptance of religious minorities in social and political life. Cultural diversity does not necessarily oppose religion, and modernization can contribute to the “*sacralization*” of society and not to its secularization, as has been the case in Japan.<sup>130</sup> A profound reorganization of religion’s social and cultural status does not inevitably mean the erasure of belief from the human consciousness and the demise of religious practices from society; it rather reflects a change in their perception and apprehension. In Tunisia, the cultural significance continues to engulf the religious symbolism and gulp its classic reference through a permanent process of secularization and globalization that nourishes an accelerated individualism and relativism that challenges the religious certainty. The invisibility of religious plurality in society and its denial in the public space (museums) has undoubtedly played a role in weakening religious plausibility, integration, and commitment in Tunisian society. Culture is growing with science and becoming stronger with society’s industrialization. This process is targeting three key axes of the religious functioning: the religiosity, absolute reality, and religious cohesion. According to this logic, religion holds loose significance in the human consciousness given the outstanding gap between its ideals and its powerlessness in the real world. Hence, its functions lose their consistencies and become unable to orient human existence or condition ethical behaviour and values. Then the question arises: Did the religious dimension become obsolete in modernity or it has just mutated, merged with other dimensions, and morphed into a diversity of religions?

Religion has not disappeared, but its foundation has been deeply unsettled by the logic of science and culture’s vitalizing forces that have profoundly destabilized its impact on social beings. In his book *Social Theory and Religion*, James A. Beckford sought to analyse the substantial decline of religion and traditional morals as well as the steady loss of their social influence, and raised serious questions about its fate in modern societies.<sup>131</sup> Certainly, the resistance of its institutions is still sturdy, but if the rate of decline continues, it will give way

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<sup>129</sup> Bruce, S. (1999). *Choice and religion: A critique of rational choice theory*. Oxford University Press on Demand, p. 186-187.

<sup>130</sup> Harootunian, H. (1999). *Memory, mourning, and national morality: Yasukuni Shrine and the reunion of state and religion in postwar Japan*. *Nation and religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, p. 144-160.

<sup>131</sup> Beckford 2003, p 31-34.

sooner or later. Bryan Wilson has also pointed out the considerable decline of religious practice by using the example of England, which faced an irreversible wave of secularization and a massive abandonment of Churches.<sup>132</sup> Jean Daniélou explained this alteration by the phenomenon of "*non-religious religion*" which means a religion lacking religiosity, as in the case of the American movement of non-religious Christianity.<sup>133</sup> This shift to plurality depleted the symbolic importance of religion as a sophisticated system of meaning and gave it a character of strangeness and submissiveness to culture. Hegel's dialectic of master/slave in his work *Phenomenology of the Spirit*<sup>134</sup> may be applied to this rivalry and bitter struggle for power between religion and culture since each of the two consciences aim to enslave the other, or even annihilate it. However, it seems that modernity has chosen the culture to be the master and kneeled down religion to be it servant. The question that arises then is whether religion yielded its place to culture, approved its inferiority, and recognized to be defeated in modernity or is it still struggling to regain its strength and position?

As Hegel claimed, at a certain point in time the master loses direct contact with things, which could be compared to the situation of religious institutions that have not thrown in the towel and try to regain their leader position. Indeed, there is an obvious persistence and confrontation between religions, modernity, and emancipation movements that aim to cut down the steady dominance of culture. Religion has not ceased to exist; it still persists and takes new forms of expression far less closely linked to past religious conception. Unlike Humans (mortal beings), the transcendental consciousness and spiritual experience cannot cease to function because of their elements of infinity and immortality.<sup>135</sup> It is then unthinkable to expect a complete disappearance of religion, and the profound passivity that has affected the religious strength does not mean its distinction.<sup>136</sup> Wilson goes a step further and claims that religion morphed into a non-threatening alternative form of culture in modern social systems, if not a "*haven*" to escape modernity and technology.<sup>137</sup> The statement of Wilson does not always hold true because few communitarian attempts to regain momentum and vitality led to dissident religious emanations of extremist nature called "*sects*" that use all possible means as seduction, mobilization, guilt-tripping, and even threats to expand. A considerable portion of people have chosen to lock themselves into religious resentment and withdrawal, and made from religion

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<sup>132</sup> Wilson 1966, p 112-115.

<sup>133</sup> Daniélou, J. (1968). *L'avenir de la religion*. FeniXX. P. 20-25

<sup>134</sup> Hegel, G. W. F. (2012). *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, Paris, Flammarion, G., translated by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, p. 600-624.

<sup>135</sup> Patočka, J. (1985). *Les fondements spirituels de la vie contemporaine. Études phénoménologiques*, 1(1), p. 84

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p 84-89.

<sup>137</sup> Wilson 1985, p 20.

the sole determinant of meaning, which has proven to be deleterious in boosting extremist thinking. P. Berger goes even further and talks about a mad resurgence of religion that triggered an opposing phenomenon called "*deseccularization*".<sup>138</sup> J. Casanova sees things differently and considers that the progressive religious decline in some countries is only an interpretation seen through the glass of the secularization paradigm, which is anecdotal if you carefully examine the surveys of religiosity in Europe and the United States.<sup>139</sup> Religion did not decline in many countries such as Japan, the USA, Indonesia, and Tunisia who identify their modernity more with religion than with Secularity.

Tunisia is witnessing a strong religious revival into an ominous dimension, perhaps even alarming. The effervescence of religion often blended with obscurantism and fundamentalism indicates a more worrisome situation that does not solely concern rural areas but urban settings too. For André Comte-Sponville, such dogmatic spirituality without reference is responsible for the strengthening of fanaticism and nihilism.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, many people are now suffering from a misconception of faith and a limited representation of God emptied from process of knowledge, which has largely contributed in creating dogmatic conflicts, wars, and massacres in the name of religion. One of the most striking examples of this flawed understanding of religion remains the effervescence of Islamic movements, which are responsible for creating fully transnational identities uncoupled from the State.<sup>141</sup> Tunisia slowly began the secularization process in 1956 and represents a prime example of such misconceptions of Islam that have resulted in more than ten terrorist attacks in eight years following the weakening of the State from 2011 onward.

### 1.4.1. The Repercussion of this Shift on Social Beings

Religion-Culture wrestling often leads to a confusion in terms of identity orientation, religious belonging, and self-identification. This bewilderment is due to the huge social influence and the likeness of both notions in several aspects, norms, and mechanisms. In modernity, the boundaries between religious and non-religious components start to fade, if not to blow down. This shift created a paradox: The religious principles are gradually becoming secularized and the secular principles are progressively becoming spiritualized. Thus, the distinction between

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<sup>138</sup> Heelas, P., Martin, D., & Woodhead, L. (2013). *Peter Berger and the study of religion*. Routledge. p 15-17.

<sup>139</sup> Casanova, J. (2009). *Eurozentristischer Säkularismus und die Herausforderung der Globalisierung*, in Politik, Religion, Markt: Die Rückkehr der Religion als Anfrage an den politisch-philosophischen Diskurs der Moderne, Innsbruck university Press, p 26

<sup>140</sup> Comte-Sponville, A. (2009). *L'esprit de l'athéisme: introduction à une spiritualité sans Dieu*. Albin Michel, p. 31-85.

<sup>141</sup> Roy, O. (2005). *La laïcité face à l'islam*. Stock, p. 114-115.

religious and non-religious forms becomes more complicated when it comes to diverse cultures and beliefs living in a shared environment mainly because of the similarity and interbreeding of their expressions.<sup>142</sup> This shift triggered the emergence of new political and sociological concepts as civil religion that Jean Jacques Rousseau deems an essential foundation for modern society or nation.<sup>143</sup> In the middle of the last century, many countries such as France, the United States, and South Korea adapted this school of thought and moved away from political religion. The multiplication of cultural and religious expression have proven to benefit human beings in breaking up the notion of single dominance, which gives an indication that beliefs have largely escaped the control of religious institutions.<sup>144</sup> This fracture with the religious institutions reconfigured the frame of religion and made from it a vicarious religion, in which an active minority operates in the places of the passive majority.<sup>145</sup> Speaking of the consequences of this shift on social beings, Grace Davie evokes an emerging phenomena called “*Believing without belonging*” and stressed the imbalance decline of both variables, in particular the rapid fall of belonging and the emergence of “*implicit religion*”.<sup>146</sup> This observation applies as well to Tunisia, since despite the fact that 885 mosques were created after the revolution; the Tunisian youth does not significantly attend the mosques and are gradually liberating themselves from stifling rigidity of religion.

The relationship between secularization and religion led to a stiff opposition between the communities charged with affectivity-solidarity on the one hand and the society charged with practicality and interest on the other.<sup>147</sup> P. Ricoeur, considers that even if these entities are different, they are not necessarily opposed because they were able to coexist and maintain evolving and complex links.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, some alteration occurring in both spheres as well as the binary opposition in religion itself makes it more difficult to coexist. Religion emptied itself of spirituality and forsook its catalytic roles to adapt with modernity and cling to life. Consequently, it finds itself unwittingly caught in a two-fold opposition and undermined by its new version emptied from spirituality on one hand and by the development and diffusion of science and culture on the other. That is to say that the religious principles are going through a steady split of fracture and persistence clearly visible in the wind up of religion, which doubly

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<sup>142</sup> Bhargava, R. (1998). *Secularism and its Critics*, Themes in Politics Series, p. 488

<sup>143</sup> Rousseau, J. J. (1976). *Du Contrat Social*, vol III. Aubier, Montaigne, p. 10-89.

<sup>144</sup> Hervieu-Léger, D. (2001). *Le pèlerin et le converti: la religion en mouvement*. Flammarion, Paris, p. 42.

<sup>145</sup> Davie, G. (2007). *The Sociology of Religion*, BSA New Horizons in Sociology, p. 22

<sup>146</sup> Davie, G. (1990). *Believing without belonging: is this the future of religion in Britain?* Social compass, 37(4) p 455

<sup>147</sup> Tönnies, F. (2015). *Communauté et société: catégories fondamentales de la sociologie pure*. Presses universitaires de France, p. 336.

<sup>148</sup> Ricœur, P. (2017). *Plaidoyer pour l'utopie ecclésiale*. Labor et Fides, p.55-60.

suffers from a self-destruction and from a secular and cultural re-use. These factors triggered a non-religious interpretation of social, political, and moral realities and hastened a cultural emancipation of the human being. Religion that previously governed the social life and held back the human thought submissive to its logic is now condemned by rationality and banned by globalization and thus gave way to a culture more suitable with the condition of modernity.<sup>149</sup> The German theorist and philosopher Carl Schmitt claims that all the prevailing concepts in modern theory were theological but have been over time secularized.<sup>150</sup> Religion has been discarded by the dynamic heterogeneity of culture and the change of historical conditions that have altered social norms and liberated the human thought.<sup>151</sup> In his work *The Theo-Cultural Revolution*, Patrick Banon used a fine metaphor to describe this shift and compared religion (outdated) to an overwhelmed old woman who found herself isolated from social schema due to her unconformity with modern reality.<sup>152</sup> After several centuries of successive industrialization, religion has been shelved, even booted out from the sphere of human agency. While it is true that social beings have felt freer without the grip of religion, did they not morph in return into unobtrusive personalities and manipulated model influenced politically and ideologically? In addition, apart from their overlaps, is there not a favourable relationship between religion and culture that can be spotlighted in the museum setting?

It would be wrong to assume that it is only a question of contrast between religions and cultures and that the current social and ethical reordering is harmful to both spheres. On the contrary, notwithstanding the slight shift of culture over religion in terms of representativeness, there is still some constructive interference between both spheres that can be seen in individuals' sense of belonging and community involvement. Culture as a mythical system of meaning favours the interbreeding of beliefs in global and pluralist societies. In this regard, Jürgen Habermas stresses the complementary relationship between both concepts and the importance of introducing self-reflection into religious and secularist consciousness, which could only be done through a "learning processes".<sup>153</sup> P. Ricoeur prefers to call it a "recollection of meaning" based on a cross-cultural dialogue between social beings regardless of their belief and non-belief.<sup>154</sup> Religion and culture share a relatively similar experiential form of reality, which provides a certain degree of interdependence and level of junction. This interbreeding triggers

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<sup>149</sup> Maritain, J. (1946). *Religion et culture*. Paris Desclée de Brouwer, p 25.

<sup>150</sup> Schmitt, C. (1988). *Théologie politique*, trad. J.-L. Schlegel. Paris: Éditions Gallimard., p 46.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p 115.

<sup>152</sup> Banon, P. (2008). *La révolution théoculturelle: comprendre et gérer la diversité religieuse dans notre société*. Presses de la Renaissance, p. 32-34.

<sup>153</sup> Habermas 2006, p. 21.

<sup>154</sup> Ricoeur 2017, p 27.

a certain rapprochement, if not alignment, between different religions and cultures, which is a major favourable issue to consider, display, and communicate with the public through museum works. In the Western Hemisphere, the reconciliation between religion and culture was a catalyst for museum updates and provided community with innovative approaches to the closeness, harmony, and cohesion between several religions and cultures. This perspective of rapprochement has further strengthened with the Catholic Church's adoption of the concept of "*inculturation*".<sup>155</sup> This initiative aimed primarily to incorporate cultural values in Christianity and inculcate religious value in human cultures. Jean Paul II mentioned at UNESCO on June 1, 1980 that religion constitutes the basic core, the navel, if not the creation of cultures, and this makes it impossible to conceive them separately.<sup>156</sup> This openness on other cultures has been severely criticized by the sociologist of the religion Hervieu-Léger, who regards this process as a collapse of the Catholic system much more than a reconfiguration, she even speaks of a disruption and deadly blow of Catholicism in modern society.<sup>157</sup> Despite a shift in approach, the overwhelming majority of disciplinary fields bear witness to the ongoing dialogue and complementarity between religion and culture. This particular interconnection can be seen in the composition of Christian culture that draws on a synthesis of Jewish legacy, Roman civilizational heritage, combined with Greek thought.<sup>158</sup> This interbreeding, alignment, and latter reconciliation of culture with religion has shaped a pluralistic environment and a consumer conscience that challenged religious values, principle, and even institution. In the meantime, the slowdown of religious activity has further boosted other social activities as economic and politic, which over time freed themselves from the religious chain and developed their own logic.

By acquiring a private character, the decline of religion has led to the diversification of social experiences and the consolidation of the "*socialization*". What this all goes to say is that the desecration as much as alignment with cultural traditions also has its negative side, since it provoked a deep religious "*inculture*", practices detachment from places of origin, and caused a deep misconception and unawareness of beliefs. Such confusion has triggered a syncretistic bewilderment to reinterpret beliefs, and a spiritual quest out of religious institutions and an uprising against religion stripped of its symbolic potential and mystical dimension. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the enlargement of social individualization is not necessarily a

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<sup>155</sup>The inculturation means the meeting of the Gospel with different cultures and introduce those in the framework of the Church. Speeches 1985 December, John Paul II, p. 21 retrieved from <https://www.vatican.va>

<sup>156</sup> Piétri, G. (2010). *Cultures et religions: les nouveaux enjeux*. Études, 413 (12), p. 643-654.

<sup>157</sup> Danièle, H. L. (2003). *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde*. Paris, Bayard, p. 92-100.

<sup>158</sup> Piétri 2010, p. 643-654.

negative on religious involvement; on the contrary, it can play in favour of religion in nourishing more the personal and intense faiths.<sup>159</sup> Religion withdrew from the social sphere but not from individual consciences, thus, the system of meaning, whether religious or cultural, that will provide more certainty will have more chance to survive.<sup>160</sup> Regarding this issue, B. R. Wilson noted that “*men do not abandon their evaluative, emotional disposition and they may continue to resort the supernatural for private gratification, but such dispositions are allowed to affect the public sphere to only a limited and decreasing extend*”.<sup>161</sup> However, does that mean that religion becomes culture when it is desecrated? Günther Anders replied to this question and claimed that the culture constitutes a refuge of all that has lost its value or for what is from the start worthless.<sup>162</sup> In addition, the dualities of “*Secularization/desecularization*” and “*sacralization/desacralization*” harmed more than helped the shape of perception and affected significant religious figures such as God, religious institution, if not the entire religious frame. This dichotomy provides a snapshot of the complexities and ambivalence of contemporary reconfigurations of religiosity in its relation to modern culture.

Several religions, such as Christianity, are substantially affected by the dissolution of the religious message and constant attenuation of the meaning maker (religious institution) and find themselves coexisting with other analogous religion and cultures.<sup>163</sup> This applies also for Islam in Tunisia, since the Islamic culture has kept part of the Islamic tradition (moderated vision) but not its privileged components. In Tunisia, a large part of social beings (believers or not) are now considering themselves descendants of a culture (Amazigh, Islamic, Christian, or Judeo-Christian) instead of feeling faithful to a specific religion. This unconscious rejection of denominational allegiance has made cultural tradition of religious nature much more sinister than the belief itself. This deep mutation can be seen in new cultural-religious behaviour in which Tunisian Jews display signs of religious belonging to Judaism without even professing the faith and Tunisian Muslims fasting on Ramadan without being devout Muslims. P. Ricoeur calls this phenomenon the “*believable available*”, which represents an advanced human concept of the world based on a “*mythico-religious core*” in which each one chooses its own identification.<sup>164</sup> This process is the result of change in values and societies’ transformation into

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<sup>159</sup> Lambert, Y. (2004). *Des changements dans l'évolution religieuse de l'Europe et de la Russie*. Revue française de sociologie, 45 (2), p. 331-332

<sup>160</sup> Woodhead, L., Heelas, P., & Martin, D. (2001). *Peter Berger and the study of religion*. Routledge, p. 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> Wilson 1985, p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> Anders, G. (2015). *L'homme sans monde: Ecrits sur l'art et la littérature*. Fario, p, 180-253.

<sup>163</sup> De Certeau, M., & Domenach, J. M. (1974). *Le christianisme éclaté*. Paris, Ed. Du Seuil, p. 10-118.

<sup>164</sup> Ricoeur 2017, p. 63-82.

multi-religious structures, which are accordingly pluricultural. Is it then possible to speak about a religious culture?

Linking a religious heritage to its confessional origin or approaching it as a cultural product is a controversial debate between philosophy and theology, which is becoming even more complicated with the strengthening of multiculturalism and plurality. The setback of the term "*religion*" for the benefit of another expression as ethic or "*mythico-religious core*" provides a snapshot of the shaping of a post-human conception that goes beyond the religious trio (creed-cult-code). P. Ricoeur encloses religion into a broader ethical and cultural system that embraces values, customs, and traditions often culturally interpreted and conceived.<sup>165</sup> In concrete terms, it means that the modern conception of reality seems somehow close, not to say uniform, to secular world outlook in its wariness and diffidence of religious lines. J. C. Monod went even further and claimed that the secularization as an irreversible process of modernity does not exclude any religion and deemed democracy and liberalism as the products of a "*secularized Christianity*".<sup>166</sup>

Following this modern overrun of cultural significance over religious affiliation, a few new concepts linking both notions have emerged during the 1960s as "*cultural Christians*" and "*cultural Muslim*" to describe religiously unobservant individuals who still identify with these cultures because of their family background and cultural environment. Some individuals worldwide prefer to associate their identities to their national and ethnic rituals rather than religious faith.<sup>167</sup> Thus, although these individuals maintained some religious traditions and customs, the label Christian or Muslim states their ethnicity or group allegiance, but not necessarily their religious beliefs. In this matter, Andre Comte-Sponville described the phenomenon in which persons have lost faith in religious and spiritual conviction and have kept faithful to their inherited values and virtues by the "*faithful atheism*".<sup>168</sup> The most prominent example of this new trend is the creation of "*The Sunday Assembly*"<sup>169</sup> in England, a church without God and religion, which did not take long to gain a foothold in France. This metamorphosis of belief constitutes a new form of Christianity, without God, dogma, and,

<sup>165</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1995). *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud*, Essais, p. 600-601

<sup>166</sup> Monod, J. C. (2002). *La querelle de la sécularisation: théologie politique et philosophies de l'histoire de Hegel à Blumenberg*. Vrin, p. 37-42.

<sup>167</sup> Aitchison, C., Hopkins, P. E., & Kwan, M. P. (Eds.). (2007). *Geographies of Muslim identities: Diaspora, gender and belonging*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. p. 147

<sup>168</sup> Comte-Sponville 2009 , p. 20-39

<sup>169</sup> This modern church is housed in an old church in north London and holds monthly gatherings for moral speeches and reflections without mentioning god accompanied with music and creation activities. Its followers believe in humanity rather than religion. Une église "sans Dieu" fait salle comble à Londres Retrieved on 05/10/2016 from [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2013/03/11/une-eglise-sans-dieu-fait\\_n\\_2852301.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2013/03/11/une-eglise-sans-dieu-fait_n_2852301.html)

above all, without Church that was only able to retain an allegiance to tradition. This phenomenon is steadily spreading in other religion and faiths. Is it then possible to speak of spirituality without God? This thought is similar to the philosophy of Theravada Buddhism and self-liberation through own efforts. This philosophy gives a particular importance to spiritual self-liberation and deems it as an ideal road to attain pure thought and inspiration and become a worthy person. The fact that each individual is responsible for his understanding of truth, behaviour, and salvation is very close to the dominant thought in modern society. Modern societies are undergoing a new form of spirituality that question the traditional religious practices and impeach the spiritual process of religious institutions. Has God become unconceivable neither as object nor as subject of religiosity?

From the 1950s, new theologies of secularization saw the light of the day in the writings of Bonhöffer, Robinson, Van Buren, Hamilton, and Tillich, attesting the death of God and the upcoming need to find a language that adapts with modernity. In his book *God Is Dead, Secularization in the West*, Bruce put great emphasis on the importance of secularization destroying the image of God, which made the religious decline a tangible reality and not a sociological myth and invention.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Sam Harris claimed in his work *Pour une spiritualité sans religion* that spirituality has become over the recent period a science of the spirit and that the spiritual path has proved able to transcend the ego.<sup>171</sup> Human beings are gradually freeing themselves from their fears and religious possession, turning toward the power of science and knowledge. Harris argues that there are individuals of different beliefs and even without belief who have had spiritual experiences of the same nature.<sup>172</sup> Spirituality is then an impulse of spirit that can be inscribed within the framework of religion or even outside the religious sphere. It is a transformative consciousness of reality that implies a detachment and liberation from the religious mental chain by coalescing intellectual, contemplative, and affective expression. Spirituality is then a gateway to a deeper experience that goes beyond egoistic and religious consciousness and morphs into a modern social and economic, artistic, or musical form. In a famous interview, folk singer Noah Gundersene mentioned that spiritual energy transcends religion, which made him try to integrate this artistic spirituality into his music.<sup>173</sup> Nobody can deny that modern societies are witnessing rebellions on religious

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<sup>170</sup> Bruce, S. (2002). *God is dead: Secularization in the West* (Vol. 3). Oxford: Blackwell, p. 74.

<sup>171</sup> Harris, S. (2017). *Pour une spiritualité sans religion-Votre guide pour une pratique spirituelle rationnelle validée*. Almora, p. 1-19

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Becklo, M. (20.02. 2014) *Je suis « spirituel mais pas religieux » : le nouveau mal du siècle ?* retrieved on 17.11.2018 from [www.fr.aleteia.org/2014/02/20/je-suis-spirituel-mais-pas-religieux-le-nouveau-mal-du-siecle/](http://www.fr.aleteia.org/2014/02/20/je-suis-spirituel-mais-pas-religieux-le-nouveau-mal-du-siecle/)

spirituality as part of a new humanist quest seeking more vital and liberating forms of expression. Notwithstanding having undermined religion in society and peoples' consciousness, modernity evolved and even emasculated secular concept such as politics, education, and collective transcendences as a family. D. Schnapper claimed that the modern exhaustion of collective transcendence, both religious and cultural, caused an uncertainty of values in societies, provoked a disintegration of the social bond, and complicated the logic of collective sovereignty, which led to conflict.<sup>174</sup>

The industrial age has not only left the traditional institution in crisis, but in stepping aside to a post-industrial era of information, it has signed its death warrant. Each era constitutes a transitional period that goes through cultural transformations, which, in the short or long term, lead to religious transformation. This amounts to saying that the new universalist claims of religions constitute a revolution in humanity's history in which the theology of religions have recognized that other traditions and societies have become increasingly multicultural and multi-religious. An interesting question then arises: How is this shift manifesting itself in Tunisia?

### 1.4.2. The Religious Scene in Tunisia: A Gradual Shift?

Tunisia is undergoing a deep sociocultural transformation highly visible in the dwindling of the religious institutional role of "*Medrassa of Zitouna*",<sup>175</sup> which has led to the decline of religious belonging and associated practices. This is puzzling, but it does not mean that Islam has lost much of its social power in Tunisia because it still impregnates and encompasses individuals, families, and society. No one can contest the role that Islam plays in Tunisian society and its importance in the lifestyle of the population. Admittedly, the majority mindedness is relatively religious, but still individuals are genuinely maintaining varied relationships to religion due to the emancipation of society from Islamic frame and strictures. At the current juncture, it is difficult to ascertain religiosity and attitudes, whether conservative or liberal, in Tunisia. Attitudes vary according to gender, geographical environment, and economic, social, and cultural level. However, there is evidence that the attachment to religion in Tunisian history is automatically strengthened in the absence of cultural enrichment and activities, particularly in disadvantaged areas where educational means and cultural settings are poor, limited, if not non-

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<sup>174</sup> Is a French sociologist and political scientist specializing in historical sociology. Schnapper, D. (2002). *La démocratie providentielle: essai sur l'égalité contemporaine* Paris: Gallimard., p 265-270.

<sup>175</sup> An institution of theological science for teaching both religious in the fiqh of rite malekite, hadith and Koran but also literary and scientific. Achour, M. E. A. B. (2000). *Le mouvement littéraire et intellectuel en Tunisie au XIVe siècle de l'Hégire (XIXe-Xe siècles)*, Tunis : Alif/Éd de la Méditerranée, p. 100-123.

existent. The unfair distribution of country benefits between the coastal zone and the country's outback, followed by the economic crisis, had led to a marginalization and underdevelopment in almost all of the country's rural part, which consequently led to the rise of religious enclosure. A research conducted in underprivileged areas in Tunisia has shown that the higher women's educational level is, the more religious dedication and wearing the veil diminish.<sup>176</sup> This example loses its relevance in countries such as the United States or Japan where religiosity is high in advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The difference is that illiteracy has become a striking phenomenon that chiefly hit women in Tunisian rural areas and open the door to the rise of religious thinking and isolationism. Rural women suffer from an illiteracy rate of 41%, particularly in the northwest, which constitute 30% of the total population.<sup>177</sup> Even more alarming is that the rate of general illiteracy has increased for the first time since independence to reach 19.1%. These appalling figures alone calls into question the state's social policy and partly explains the resurgence of extremism in deprived areas.

Concomitantly, in urban regions, a large section of the population is gradually moving away from the grip of religion and integrating into the sphere of modern world culture. Tunisia, as described by many scholars, represents an atypical example in terms of the brand of Islam and its relationship to politics. From 1956 onward, religion morphed into an object of reform as part of a modernization action to intelligently interpret Islam precepts and adapt them to the requirements of modernity.<sup>178</sup> Individual freedom, principle of equality, and women's emancipation have been the key elements making from Tunisian experience an exception in the Arab and Muslim world. The first rebellion on religion was the promulgation of the personal code of law that formally broke with the Muslim law. Thus, Polygamy was abolished and women obtained the right to work, to create businesses without spouses' consent, to vote, and even to candidate in election. This modernizing process consolidated the position of women in the public sphere, which subsequently contributed to a deep-seated change in Tunisian society.<sup>179</sup> It should not have waited until a second overturning of religious landscape when the State stressed the need for a sea change away from religious tradition as the non-obligation of wearing the veil, which according to Bourguiba has nothing to do with the religion.

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<sup>176</sup> Haïblé-Sfayhi, N. (1980). *La femme tunisienne, aspects législatifs, psychologiques et sociologiques de son évolution*, Doctoral dissertation, p. 1-250.

<sup>177</sup> Dejoui, N. (13.09.2018). *Tunisie: le taux d'analphabétisme est en hausse et atteint 19.1%*. retrieved on 10.01.2019. from [www.leconomistemaghreb.com/2018/09/13/analphabete-tunisie/](http://www.leconomistemaghreb.com/2018/09/13/analphabete-tunisie/)

<sup>178</sup> Bourguiba, H. (25.01.1973). *Rôle déterminant des sciences et de la technologie dans le progrès des Nations*, Ministère des Affaires Culturelles et de l'Information, Tunis.

<sup>179</sup> Bessis, S. (2004). *Bourguiba féministe: les limites du féminisme d'État bourguibien*. Bourguiba, la trace et l'héritage, p. 109

Progressively, the secular trend reached considerable depths in social fabric and overwrote the denominational lines of Islam. Nonetheless, according to Stephanie Le Bars, this perspective triggered a contradictory spirit of society, which is simultaneously charged with a certain degree of religiosity despite its secularity.<sup>180</sup> How is it possible for Tunisian society to be both secular and religious?

The description of Stephanie Le Bars does not have a metaphorical meaning but it stresses the chronological sequence and tussle between modern culture and religion in the Tunisian social scene. This power struggle undertook three different phases: the beginning of a long modernization process in the 1960s, followed by a religious resistance and a return to tradition in the 1970s and 1980s, to end up with a restart of secularization with enforced procedures from the 1990s. Indeed, the fact that religion has been reformed does not mean that the spirit of Islam that dominated the common consciousness of the social beings disappeared. Belief has not ceased to be alive and active in Tunisians' conscience, on the contrary, it further strengthened with mystical thirst of relics' veneration that lasted for decades after the independence. Proof of this assertion has been the birth of conservative factions in 1970, which blocked the modernist layout and cultural route, rejected the project of gender equality in inheritance, and even succeeded in banning marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims in 1973. Tunisia has gone through several cultural tensions and confrontations to establish a modern social structure and partially separating religion from the State. It took decades until Tunisia yielded to the very secular movement and went through an emerging spirituality unrelated to religious denomination.

At the beginning of this century, the realm of religion has been ruthlessly rattled in Tunisia through the proclamation of laws, code, and initiatives deemed extremely secular for an Arabic country. The law of gender equality in inheritance that was previously refused was proclaimed again by a presidential initiative in 2018 to spare religious sensitivity and improve women status. Even more striking, the administrative circulars of 1973 prohibiting the marriage of Tunisian women with non-Muslims has been abolished by order of the President of the Republic. Moreover, a commission of individual freedoms and equality has been assigned to promote universal human rights and control all kinds of discrimination, which has brought the untouchability of Islam to its knees. The Commission has issued its report to the President of the Republic calling for immediate repeal of articles 226 and 226 bis (moral and mistreatment

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<sup>180</sup> Le Bars, S. (29.01.2011). *Une société marquée par 'une certaine religiosité' malgré sa laïcité*, Le Monde.

offenses), article 230 of the Penal Code criminalizing homosexuality, and article 236 criminalizing adultery. Even the actual religious discourses provide a snapshot of an intellectual and religious duplication to suit the spirit of modernity. There is no more compelling evidence proving that the core cultural principle took precedence over religious conviction than presenting a Tunisian Jew Simon Slama by an Islamist party Ennahdha at the head of its municipal list in Monastir in February 2018. The revision of the Islamic party's perspective provides a crude index of significant mindset change regarding the previous dogmatic stance that no longer suits current societal and political culture. With distance and hindsight, public conscience become aware that even a partial application of Sharia law is very difficult, if not impossible, in the social and political realities of the era. Is it possible then to speak of a secular Islam in Tunisia?

In the past, Tunisia was hampered by the weight of religion and Islamic traditions; however, the State is gradually attempting to forsake the use of religious precepts in its judicial system to embark firmly on the path of modernity. Albeit slowly, but surely, Tunisia got rid of the pre-eminence of religion and made progress on the road to democracy and secularity. It has demonstrated that the Arab-Muslim culture is responsive to modernity and adaptable to the right of citizenship when religion is properly interpreted and moved away from its traditional role. In Tunisia, the concept of secularization, bolstered by Tunisia's complex heritage, has sharply contrasted society's need for modernization and its religious attachment, which necessitates a new interpretation of religious texts to get out of this dichotomy. The time has come for Tunisia to make a wise choice between secular Islam charged with reasonableness and a political Islam that aims for totalitarian control of society through fundamentalism. The renovation of Muslim thought has become crucial for the welfare of society, mainly because the option of chasing Islamists has turned out inefficient and boosted extremism instead. The misconception of Islam lies primarily in an inadequate understanding of Islam and a religious instruction based predominantly on the hadiths. Several Tunisian thinkers have criticized the relevance of the hadiths (tradition related to prophets' acts and words) used as a second source of legislation after the Qur'an mainly for its poor reliability and appeals for violence. Sharia is a human construct marked in its current version by a particular ruthless nature obviously clear in invented violent notions such as stoning and apostasy, which does not exist in the Qur'an.

For the Tunisian Islamologist M. Talbi, Muslims should no longer have trust in these untrustworthy texts that chronologically appeared two centuries after the prophet and stained

the image of Islam.<sup>181</sup> Hadith as well as sharia are human endeavours that could be criticized, reviewed, and modernized to adapt the regulation on human rights and the good of humankind. In his book entitled *Ma religion est ma liberté*, M. Talbi claims that Islam is born secular and the Koran is full of rational and modern significance, but both have been altered by the hadiths and sharia.<sup>182</sup> Even more important, he deemed Islam as a form of humanism since the Koran does not contain a chapter on sacred extermination.<sup>183</sup> Talbi considers that Islam is compatible with democracy when it is intelligently interpreted and dynamically understood.<sup>184</sup> To defend his thesis of the secularity of the Koran, Talbi relied on verses from the Qur'an to show the peaceful nature of its message, such as “*There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion*”,<sup>185</sup> and “*And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?*”<sup>186</sup> and “*Not upon the Messenger is [responsibility] except [for] notification. And Allah knows whatever you reveal and whatever you conceal*”.<sup>187</sup> Similarly, Tareq Oubrou claims that the Qur'anic Text has the capacity to decontextualize and free itself from its initial context with an updatable semiological interpretation to suit the ongoing cultural context and to preserve the equivalence of its meaning.<sup>188</sup> With a certain cultural and temporal distance, the hermeneutic reading of religious texts should not be direct, but rather dynamic, innovative, and ambivalent to be able to correct what is perfectible for the good of humanity and the spiritual evolution.

It has become clear that Islam in countries significantly marked by secularization such as Tunisia may have weakened and morphed into an identity marker and a sense of community belonging. In Tunisia, there is a constant call for the abundance of the pre-eminence of religious power and the upcoming need to modernize to implement democracy. This is borne out by the fact that the Islamic party Ennahdha has been forced in 2013 to Step back from their position of power due to demonstrations protesting political Islam. Faced with an intellectual and religious split and an arduous adjustment with modern thought, Tunisia has made great strides in Macrosocial secularization (relationship between state and religion) as well as in organizational

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<sup>181</sup> Talbi is a Tunisian thinker and Islamologist who adopted a vectorial reading of Qur'an by rejecting judgments bequeathed from medieval times. Talbi, M. (2011). *Ma religion c'est la liberté*. L'islam et les défis, p. 1-35.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> Talbi, M., & Manaï, A. (2002). *La liberté d'expression et la responsabilité de l'intellectuel musulman*. Horizons Maghrébins-Le droit à la mémoire, 46 (1), p. 38-46.

<sup>185</sup> Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah [2:256]

<sup>186</sup> Quran, Surah Yunus [10:99]

<sup>187</sup> Quran, Surah Al-Ma'idah [5:99]

<sup>188</sup> Oubrou, T. (2002). *La pensée musulmane, entre le divin et l'humain*. Autres Temps, 74(1), 13-19. p 17.

secularization (control and neutralization of mosques), however, individual secularization (microsocial level) requires a lot of investment and perseverance to free common thought from dogmatism. It must also be mentioned that a specific social class in Tunisia, “*globalized elite*”, with higher education has fully embraced secularization by interpreting society according to a logic of subculture. The cultural symmetry and identity matrix in Tunisia has become a concern in the identity building, especially since many Tunisians started to discard Islam and claimed their “*Tunisianity*”<sup>189</sup> or “*Amazighness*”. With a view to better explaining what this identity matrix means, I will trace in the next part the religious history of Tunisia from the Neolithic period to the modern era.

### 2. A Historical Overview on Religion in Tunisia

A society cannot be a producer of a monolithic religious system since it contains different levels of religious consciousness that should not exclusively be conveyed into a specific ritual discourse. The social circle, religious framework, whether public, familiar, or private, and associated ritual practice structures could induce variations to religion. As a result, this concept wins a bondless series of qualifiers: official, popular, family, civic, private, or personal. The archaeological data and historiographical renewals help to understand religious traditions and consciousness and improve the tracing of religious practice and rituals. Historically, exploring the religious phenomena does not intend to change the perception of religion, nor describe the set of practices and beliefs, but rather try to find explanatory factors for social beings’ religious behaviours and trace religious expressions’ evolution. The Paleolithic, Neolithic, and ancient religions provide a privileged ground for optimum understanding of religious creed, organization, and rites such as purifications, sacrifice, and divination. During this period, many myths have turned into religious knowledge and new notions such as superstition and piety have come into being. To understand where the religious feeling and need to believe comes from, there is a need to look back to prehistory and decipher scientific literature in order to set when this phenomena emerged. This section outlines a comparative study that analyses religious practices and expression in Tunisia from prehistory to the modern epoch to provide a better religious identity accuracy. Starting from prehistory does not necessarily mean doing an extensive historical work but rather drawing a picture of religious identity in ancient times. Building on past research in archaeology, history, and history of religions, I will establish an

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<sup>189</sup> A concept established by Bourguiba valorizing the Tunisian collective identity before the Islamic and Arab identity.

anthropological and historian summary that explain in details the religious chronology in Tunisia using data critical review and comparison.

In the Neolithic, the majority of North African populations was a mixture of people formed of two groups coming from West Asia, a white group from the Northeast and a second group from the Southeast, which mingled with Blacks from Eastern Africa.<sup>190</sup> Thynes, Kart Hadacht, Kartago, and Ifriquiya in the middle age are among the well-known denomination of Tunisia throughout history. Its religious history that goes back millennia generated a collective cultural and religious matrix, not always homogeneous and serene, since each civilization has left its print, knowledge, and religious markers, which often led to conflictive situations. These specific religious characters have been transferred throughout history starting from the earliest evidence for human activity in the form of living tools in Kelibia coming from the Middle Stone Age (around 200,000 years ago).<sup>191</sup>

### 2.1. Religion in the Paleolithic Period

Religious beliefs and obedience in prehistory was a cognitive notion incredibly difficult to identify or to trace because of insufficient evidence available on this subject. It is not appropriate to speak of religion before the Neolithic since prehistory sciences remain unable to scientifically reveal the origins of religion and if at that stage humans had religious feeling or devotional ideas.<sup>192</sup> The question that arises is—does religion represent a subsequent construct of a non-religious man released from the clutch of the animality of the Stone Age. The first evidence of the existence of religious ideas dates back to the Middle Paleolithic, grew in the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic periods, and became recognizable in the Bronze Age. Quaternary art, excavated objects, and logic of grave arrangement provides valuable information about prehistory imaginary and confirm the existence of a certain religious impulse during the Paleolithic period. It is difficult to tell with precision the exact form of religiosity in the Paleolithic, but it is possible to confirm that their spirituality derived from the environment around them. A large part of quaternary art reproduced illustrations of animals scratched on caves walls, which reveals a passion to animals as a source of survival but may also mirror a religious worship to these living creatures. Salomon Reinach and Ina Wunn contend that this affinity embodied in cave paintings shows a form of Totemism or Animalism that goes beyond

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<sup>190</sup> Laroui, A. (1975). *L'histoire du Maghreb (2): Un essai de synthèse*. FeniXX, p. 17.

<sup>191</sup> D. Wheeler & P. Clammer & E. Filou (2010) *Tunisia*. Lonely Planet, p. 26.

<sup>192</sup> Jules, M. (2016) *Les religions de la préhistoire*. L'âge paléolithique. In: *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France*, tome 8, n°40, p. 320-323.

a simple homage to animal species and reflects an animal-cult, potentially for wild species such as bears.<sup>193</sup> In the absence of clear evidence and untraceable funerary practice, their line of argument was not convincing and was therefore rejected. The funerary practices or “*funerary caching*” emerged with the “*Neanderthals*” and “*Homo heidelbergensis*”, which provides an indication of a form of belief in afterlife that implied burying five to fifteen deceased in common graves.<sup>194</sup> Burial techniques progressed in the Middle Paleolithic period and incorporated furniture in graves, which morphed from groups to individualized use. According to Formicola, sacrificial practices and animal offerings took shape at a later stage for reasons relating to ancestor worship and changed in the upper Paleolithic to human offerings, mainly of females and children.<sup>195</sup>

### 2.1.1. The Mousterian

The first trace of human existence in Tunisian territory dates back to the Paleolithic, and the Mousterian is an appellation given by archaeologists to a style of predominantly flint industry dating to the Middle Paleolithic, (160–35-30 ka) associated primarily with Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*). In the town of Gafsa, the palaeontologist Michel Gruet made a breakthrough in the history of Tunisia when he excavated remnants of a population of hunters and fruit pickers that he called the Mousterian.<sup>196</sup> The vestige has a specific structure made up of 4000 flints cut into spheroids and arranged in a cone about 75 centimetres high and 130 centimetres in diameters.<sup>197</sup> This ruin contained stones, carved flint objects, capridae and bears’ bones, and teeth of mammals, which give an accurate idea of a religious sentiment, if not worship, of animals, mainly bear and plantigrades. Nevertheless, André Leroi-Gourhan rejected the theory of animals’ as a religious fascination and explained the presence of bears skulls and residual in prehistoric cave with animal behaviour to gather debris in order to create an adequate space for hibernation.<sup>198</sup> The excavation of 1950 has been of fundamental importance in tracing the religious history in Tunisia and confirmed that some religious idea, indeed belief, took shape in the actual region of Gafsa 40,000 years ago. The archaeological investigations revealed an indicator of religious activity associated with a temple that presumably constitutes one of the

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<sup>193</sup> Wunn, I. (2000). *Beginning of religion*. Numen, 47(4), p. 417-452.

<sup>194</sup>Pettitt, P. (2002). *When burial begins*. British archaeology (York), (66), p. 9-10.

<sup>195</sup> Formicola, V. (2007). *From the Sunghir children to the Romito dwarf: aspects of the Upper Paleolithic funerary landscape*. Current Anthropology, 48 (3), p. 446.

<sup>196</sup>Moro, A., & Kalaora, B. (2006). Désert: de l’écologie du divin au développement durable. Paris, L’Harmattan. p. 110.

<sup>197</sup> Gruet, M. (1954). *Le gisement moustérien d’El Guettar*. tome V, p. 79.

<sup>198</sup> A. Leroi-Gourhan (20.04.2009) *Les religions de la préhistoire*, le terrier de Megham, retrieved on 09.01.2018 from : <http://le-terrier-de-megham.over-blog.com/article-30477238.html>.

oldest structures of religious significance known to humankind.<sup>199</sup> The palaeontologists attested that this structure made of offerings reflects a magical or a religious belief commonly tied to precipitation and fertility. The edifice was called *El Guettar Hermaïon*, in reference to the myth and the stones thrown to the feet of Hermes by the Olympian deities in the murder of giant Argos.<sup>200</sup>

### 2.1.2. The Capsian

The Capsian are the direct ancestors of Numidians who lived between 9,000 and 7,500 BC and settled in actual Tunisia and southern Constantine before spreading throughout the Maghreb. Their implementation took shape in the Upper Paleolithic, continued in the Neolithic, and covered the period going from the eighth to the fifth millennium BC.<sup>201</sup> Paul Boudy discovered the remains of this civilization around the town of actual Gafsa. The remaining vestiges are nail debris forming artificial hills, ash accumulation, religious objects and tools, and human and animal bones.<sup>202</sup> Depending on the type of cut stones found on the sites, researchers recognized two types of Capsian having different manufacturing perspectives: typical Capsian and Upper Capsian. The first produced a voluminous industry of splinters and blades consisting mainly of chisels without geometric frames, and the second produced slats fitted with geometric frames.<sup>203</sup> According to Rahmani, during the Capsian period, religious ideas would have progressed, practice and structure would have changed, and rites would become more complex and organized. Many palaeontologists reckon that believing in supernatural powers did not change, however, resurrection myths emerged, and, consequently; many object and building occurred symbolic significations and religious functionalities.<sup>204</sup> Capsian's funeral practices, stone constructions, and figurative paintings mirror the efflorescence of the religious feeling but above based on archaeological evidence the growth of a belief in a life after death. Indeed, given the escalation of infectious diseases and disease outbreak in that period, the death rate raised, which boosted a fear of death in collective imaginary linked to the wrath of nature. Several clues suggest that there was a spiritual dimension during the Caspian period and a prevailing magic attitude in stone man's spirit. The fact that objects' ornamental signs and the symbols

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<sup>199</sup> Moro & Kalaora 2006, p 110.

<sup>200</sup> Chavaillon, J. (1988). *El Guettar*, Tunisie, Dictionnaire de la Préhistoire, ed. PUF, Paris, p. 354

<sup>201</sup> Daghari-Ounissi, M. H. (2002). *Tunisie, habiter sa différence: le bâti traditionnel du sud-est tunisien*. Editions L'Harmattan., p. 32.

<sup>202</sup> Sheppard, P., & Lubell, D. (1990). *Early Holocene Maghreb prehistory: an evolutionary approach*. Sahara, 3, p. 63-69.

<sup>203</sup> Rahmani, N. (2004). *Technological and cultural change among the last hunter-gatherers of the Maghreb: the Capsian (10,000–6000 BP)*. Journal of World Prehistory, 18(1), p. 57-61.

<sup>204</sup> Fuller, J. E., & Grandjean, B. D. (2001). *Economy and religion in the Neolithic revolution: material surplus and the proto-religious ethic*. Cross-Cultural Research, 35(4), p 375-376.

etched in potholes were split in a well-defined order forming two distinct groups (male and female) reflect a complex cosmogony and a fascination with nature spirituality in people's minds. Is it possible to explain this religious idea by a form shamanism? It is difficult to provide precise information about Caspian religious form due to large hypothetical interpretations, contradictory readings of trace fragments, and information fragility. Nonetheless, it is certain that the Caspian professed a worship of nature and not of gods because specialists in religious archaeology attest that gods' conception emerged only in the Bronze Age.<sup>205</sup>

## 2.2. Religion in the Neolithic and Antiquity: Emergence of Myths

In the Neolithic, spiritual thinking progressed, and religious practice evolved, and thus, archaeologists were able to discern undeniable forms of religiosity still visible in remnants of pottery and figurines. The objects found in the megalith of Makther suggest that there were worship ceremonies, religious reasoning, and a belief in another world evinced in new mortuary and burial practices. Indeed, with the birth of agriculture, and consequently the birth of divinities, North Africa has seen a burst of religious and cultural symbolism and a shape of a social dimension. Is it then possible to consider these symbols an expression of religion? Religion is a relatively recent concept that does not include the prehistoric religious imagination.<sup>206</sup> It is true that human imaginary capacity progressed in this period of history and become capable of carrying religious thought.<sup>207</sup> Yet it would be an exaggeration to say that was a separate religious arena of life or distinct religious buildings in North Africa before 4500 BC because the dwellings themselves were both domestic and religious.

In antiquity, early features of the urbanization emerged, and religious beliefs got rid of the fascination of nature with the appearance of deity worship. The religious impulse and spirituality did not rest on a dogma and fear but drew its strength from religious myths related to polytheistic thought in which each god corresponded to every circumstance of life. Did ancient myths constitute a form of religion? It would be inappropriate to deem myths as a foreign component of religion even if they do not provide a direct relationship with the worship. There were differences of opinion about this issue, scholars opposed myth and worship despite their belonging to same liturgical category and others deemed the mythopoetic element as one of the essential components of ancient religion.<sup>208</sup> It is undeniable that etiological narratives held popular religiosity and have been for a certain lapse of time fundamental mechanisms of

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<sup>205</sup> Wesler, K. W. (2012). *An archaeology of religion*. University Press of America, p. 155.

<sup>206</sup> Bellah, R. N. (1964). *Religious evolution*, in «American Sociological Review», 29, p. 358- 370.

<sup>207</sup> Van Huyssteen, J. W. (2006). *Alone in the world? Human uniqueness in science and theology; the Gifford lectures*, the University of Edinburgh, spring 2004. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 1-347.

<sup>208</sup> Rudhardt, J. (1981). *Du Mythe, de la religion grecque et de la compréhension d'autrui*, Geneva. Revue Européenne des sciences sociales, 19 (58), p. 305-306.

religious functioning. However, accurately exploring ancient "lived-sacred"<sup>209</sup> remains is evidently difficult to carry out because of the scarcity of archaeological evidence on one hand and the nonexistence of textual sources on the other.

### 2.2.1. Aspects of Lybico-Numidian Polytheism and Early Judaism

As time went on, several migration flows occurred in North Africa and enriched the local population that has been interweaved with Libyque minority communities, *Amazigh* often called "*Berber*".<sup>210</sup> The settlement of these tribal peoples has been dated to the fourth millennium BC; however, given the paucity of evidence, their origins and first religious defining characteristic are not yet fully clear.<sup>211</sup> Mr Hachid claims that the origin of the first Berbers of North Africa goes back more than 10,000 years with the beginning of the settlement of the Sahara.<sup>212</sup> It did not take much time for the newcomers to constitute a linguistic unit that quickly spread across the southern Mediterranean from the northern shoreline to the Sudan and from the Atlantic to Egypt. Nevertheless, this linguistic unity did not imply a religious unity in worships and practices. They only shared a deep religious devotion to divinities, mysterious powers, and supernatural beings. Apart from polytheism, the veneration of animal species persisted in north Africa, since some rock engravings and paintings found in present-day Tunisia and Algeria (Bou 'Alem in Southern Oran) representing rams surmounted by a solar disk attest that Libyans considered rams as a deities.<sup>213</sup> It should be pointed out that the religious devotion, "*imagistic*", and liaising attempts with supernatural strengthening were more pronounced and intensive in rural environments, unlike the urban areas that were marked by a religious low arousal.<sup>214</sup> The most likely explanation for this religious discrepancy is that urban communities focused on improving their life through creations, which contradicts with asceticism and marvel at nature.

The vast majority of Amazigh were living in fields, forests, and troglodyte dug into the rock face, which put them in close contact with nature's power and violence. Far more important is that North Africa inhabitants adored uneven reliefs too as rough terrain such caves, rocks, and mountains, which were considered as divinities or as a seat of a divine being. They venerated landform features such as the mountain of "*Bou'l Qornin*" /former "*Balcaranensis*" and

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<sup>209</sup> An expression meaning the religious life in the past, used in the book of Meslin, M. (1973). *Pour une science des religions*, Paris, p.9.

<sup>210</sup> Briggs, L. C. (1979). *Tribes of the Sahara*. Ardent Media, p. 34-36.

<sup>211</sup> Khaldoun, I. (1852). *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale*, p. 82-83.

<sup>212</sup> Hachid, M (2000) *Les premiers Berbères*. Entre Méditerranée, Tassili et Nil, Aix en Provence: Edisud, p. 1-5.

<sup>213</sup> Gsell, S. (1900). *Chronique archéologique africaine*. Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, 20 (1), p. 83.

<sup>214</sup> Imagistic is a term used by H. Whitehouse to describe a low arousal of religiosity and a high intensity of rituals. Whitehouse, H. (2004). *Modes of religiosity: A cognitive theory of religious transmission*. Rowman Altamira, p. 1-208.

mountain of “*Chemtou*”, and supernatural beings (genies) sitting in caves and caverns as “*Mactar*” and “*Testour*” Genies.<sup>215</sup> Amazigh adored imaginary creatures such as dragon and prayed for their mercy and pity. This has been evidenced by an inscription found in Ain Goulea dedicated to (Draconi augusto), a golden-headed bronze serpent invoking the deity Eschmoun.<sup>216</sup> Two inscriptions in Latin verse discovered in Sidi Yousof and Ain Mtirchou give a precise indication that northern Amazigh worshiped the wind invoked by the deity Juno and the sun as a huge religious strength.<sup>217</sup> Worshiping the sun was a distinctive feature of Amazigh’s religious imaginary, unlike Libyques’ imaginary that gave an enormous importance only for the setting sun. The sunset formed for them a manifestation of the deity Hammon, who drew his main strength from the ram's horns just as the sun drew its strength from its rays.<sup>218</sup> The Amazigh saw others’ beliefs with an open outlook, despite the fact that they sometimes were forced to adopt their invaders’ faith and rituals. Just a small proportion rejected this religious enforcement and stayed faithful to its ancestral worship. To demonstrate their fealty to their conquerors, Amazigh adored Greek, Phoenicians, Carthaginian, and Roman deities such as Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Pluto, Venus, Mars, Apollo, Neptune, Mercury, Ceres, and Hercules, and even worshiped Eastern deities such as Mithra, Malagbel, Mater Magna Isis, and Sarapis.<sup>219</sup> This religious pressure reached its peak in the Roman Era when the Amazigh were forced to pray for the Roman emperor of African origin “*Septimius Severus*”.

From the third century BC, the North African population witnessed the advent of a new faith brought by communities escaping religious persecutions after the destruction of Solomon's temple and the massacres in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>220</sup> All the same, other archaeological sources suggest that these Jews are originally from Egypt and Cyrenaica who fled to North Africa out of fear of being killed or wounded.<sup>221</sup> Alfred Louis and David Cazès suggested that some Israelite leaders were among the Punic empire’s founders in 814 BC, however, their hypothesis remains difficult to prove. Assumptions concerning a Jewish presence in Carthage during the Punic era are weak and draw only on interpretation of the word “*Sallum*” engraved in Punic

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<sup>215</sup> Basset, R. (1910). *Recherches sur la religion des Berbères*. Revue de l'Histoire des Religions, p. 5-10.

<sup>216</sup> Gsell, S. (1894). *Tipasa, ville de la Maurétanie Césarienne*. Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, 14 (1), p. 310-311.

<sup>217</sup> Basset 1910, p 11.

<sup>218</sup> Capella, M. F. M. (1866). *De nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii et de septem artibus liberalibus libri novem... accedunt scholia in Caesaris Germanici Aratea*. Teubner. P. 44.

<sup>219</sup> Basset, p 27.

<sup>220</sup> Ayoun, R., Cohen, B., & NAHON, G. (1982). *Les Juifs d'Algérie*. Deux mille ans d'histoire, p 27.

<sup>221</sup> Hadas-Label, M. (1999). *Les juifs en Afrique romaine*, Histoire communautaire, histoire plurielle : la communauté juive de Tunisie, Tunis, p. 101-110.

inscriptions found in Carthage.<sup>222</sup> In addition, few inscriptions found during national excavations were dedicated to Roman divinity and invoked the Jews' god Iao or Jehovah, which reflect a Judaic influence in the Roman religious arena.<sup>223</sup>

Concerning the arrival of the Jewish community to Djerba, the history derives from a legend that links African Judaism to an Israelite priesthood member who brought a remnant of Solomon's Temple after its destruction in 586 BC and erected a place of pilgrimage and veneration.<sup>224</sup> Instead, what has been evident is that the first tangible trace of Jewish presence in Africa Proconsularis dates back to the second century AD, which provided a precise insight of Jewish religious impulse in urban areas. Moreover, some Rabbinic Judaism basic texts, "*Talmud*", mentioned names of Carthaginian rabbis such as Isaac and Abba who lived between II and IV century, which adds strength to this dating.<sup>225</sup> The archaeological findings of Naro's old synagogue and the Gamarth necropolis (200 burial chambers) provides an overview of the huge size of the Jewish community and its religious turmoil. At the beginning, the Jewish communities chose to settle in inner regions such as Simittu, but under Numidian pressure, they moved under idolatrous Amazigh protection and took refuge in deserts and mountainous massifs. This repression lasted for centuries and generated a feeling of appreciation and admiration for Judaism among the Amazigh, which triggered a wave of conversion to the new faith. The religious awe grew and spread in other tribes such as Louata, Nefoussa, and Djeraoua that previously practiced idolatrous worship and professed Judaism later on.<sup>226</sup> It is important to point out that Jews did not seek to exercise Proselytism in Africa Proconsularis nor sought to increase the adhesion to Judaism but rather kept a low profile toward the prevailing religious coercion. Despite this, the religious interbreeding between these communities has been tremendous and influenced Amazighs' tradition, practice, spiritual thinking, and even written and oral literature. Even more importantly, this crossbreeding was a two-way process since Jews have also adopted some forms of social and ritual organization taken from Aboriginal groups, contrary to Arabic-speaking Jews who came later.<sup>227</sup> After centuries of a Phoenician presence in North Africa, Jewish communities mingled with the Punic neighbours who spoke a language close to Hebrew, which shaped a new Semitic thinking that rejects human sacrifice

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<sup>222</sup> Scholars think that *Sallum* derives from *Salom* in Hebrew epitaphs. Delattre, A. L., & Delattre, A. J. (1895). *Gamarth ou la nécropole juive de Carthage*. Imprimerie Mougin-Rusand. p. 48.

<sup>223</sup> Molinie, P. (1897). *Mémoires des Antiquaires de France*, t. LVIII, p. 212.

<sup>224</sup> alensi, L., & Udovitch, A. L. (1984). *Juifs en terre d'Islam: les communautés de Djerba* (Vol. 1). Éditions des archives contemporaines p. 8-13

<sup>225</sup> Neubauer, A. (1868). *La géographie du Talmud*. Michel Lévy frères, p. 411.

<sup>226</sup> Khaldoun, I. (1854). *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale* (Vol. 2). Imprimerie du gouvernement. p. 483

<sup>227</sup> Bensimhon, G., & Daniel J. Schroeter. (1999). *Juifs parmi les Berbères: fotogr. d'Elias Harrus*. Musée d'art et d'histoire du judaïsme. p. 10-20.

and had Rome as common enemy. The recognition of Judaism in the African religious arena did not come into being by the wave of a magic wand, this Judaization process began at the end of the first century and its acceptance has been done over centuries.<sup>228</sup>

### **2.2.2. From Polytheism to Monotheism: Religious Structure During Punico-Carthaginian and Roman Eras**

The arrival of the Phoenicians coming from Tyre in 1100 BC was a political, commercial, and mainly a religious milestone in North Africa history. The Carthaginian Empire was one of the largest and longest-lived empires in the Mediterranean region that succeeded in establishing a new religious system deeply marked by a Western-Semitic character.<sup>229</sup> Punic religion was a matter of state charged with mythical and magic thought, and priests had not a considerable influence on the empire's interior and exterior policy. The religion was heavily substantial and meaningful for the population of Carthage. They prayed to gods and made offerings for the deity to hear and meet their prayer. The Carthaginian pantheon that originated in Semitic roots mixed with Numidia's traditions has evolved over time and has included relatively a high number of divinities.<sup>230</sup> Ba'al Hammon and his consort Tanit were the chief deities of Punic pantheon, and over time, they acquired specific Numidian characteristics that set them apart from the East. One specific feature of the Punic religion was its syncretism and openness to change and influence of Italian and Greek divinities. Given the constant relations with the Greeks of Sicily, the Hellenic religion had its say in the Carthaginians' religious thinking, and thus Apollo was assimilated to Baal Hammon and Tanit to Persephone.

What is most striking about Punic religion is the significant role that the female deity (Tanit) played in public religious conviction, because she was deemed as the mother, naturist, and lunar goddesses. Nonetheless, this high esteem for female deities changed during the third century BC after the effacement of female elements who morphed into subordinate divinities. This wilful neglect of female component reflects the large impact of Jewish scope (Israelite Jehovism) on Punic thinking, which implied worship only for a masculine deity endowed with eternal wisdom, away from any feminine influence.<sup>231</sup> Besides the official cult, the Punic worshipped also healing and protective gods inspired from Phoenician mythology such as Eshmoun, Shadrappa, Sid, and Horon. The Carthaginian religious arena gave high priority to the cult of minor divinities in charge of protecting the sailors and sinners, which gave birth to

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<sup>228</sup> Albertini, E. (1938). *L'Empire romain* (Vol. 4). F. Alcan. p.165.

<sup>229</sup> Szynger, M. (1978). *Carthage et la civilisation punique*. Nicolet (dir.), p. 586.

<sup>230</sup> Dridi, H. (2006). *Carthage et le monde punique* (Vol. 21). Les Belles Lettres, p. 170-176.

<sup>231</sup> Réville, A. (1873). *La religion des Phéniciens*. Revue des Deux Mondes (1829-1971), Paris, p. 105.

a set of magic heroes and deities united in one system called “*Cabire*”.<sup>232</sup> Over the centuries, Carthage became a dominant trade and military power in the western Mediterranean and exercised Proselytism, which had bothered Rome on the other coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This politico-religious tussle compelled Rome to declare war against Carthage after the Sicily conflict. Thus, a bloody war took place between the two empires, lasted nearly a century, and caused many collateral damages. During the third Punic War, Rome succeeded in destroying Carthage in 146 BC, which provided a different georeligious reality in Numidia.

The Romans were devout believers who connected all life sectors to divinities and ascribed all their woes to avoid the displeasure of gods. Jean Bayet stressed that Romans’ religious lines drew on two main elements: “*Pax deorum*” (gods’ peace) and *Religio* (moral duty), which were essential to achieve any activity in daily life.<sup>233</sup> Roman religion involved a complex set of beliefs and rituals, primarily dedicated to the Capitoline Triad Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, that had a topical power attached to a Rome Capitol. Based on the stars’ motion, Romans assigned functional powers to their cosmos deities and aerial gods, who ensured their spiritual and material well-being. Their religious activity was based on a civic and ritualistic principle characterized by a legal status in which only the city authorized or forbid a religious rite or a veneration of a god. Every city had specific gods and rituals that should be made to preserve gods’ peace and justice toward the dead, and to ensure the city’s prosperity, growth, and victory in case of war.

Roman religious ideas were not based on fear of gods, but rather on mutual faithfulness and protection that occur when the piety is respected and rituals are acquitted. The Jew’s situation improved with Cesar’s decision that gave them a privileged status to freely practice their worship. Accordingly, Roman authority as the only permitted faith belonging to official worship recognized Judaism. Thus, Jews were not forced to pray to Roman divinities with a condition of praying their god for the greater good of the empire in exchange for having their own synagogues and being exempted from religious requirement incompatible with their faith.<sup>234</sup> As time went by, the African religious arena freed itself from the unwavering commitment to religious myths and gave trust in human strength, genius, and ability to reach a religious, if not “sacred”, character.<sup>235</sup> This aspect took shape during Augustus’ reign with the assignment of the status of god to the emperor who took in charge the regularization of the

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<sup>232</sup> Cabire is Semitic appellation that drawn from “*kebirim*” meaning almighty gods. Gernet, L., & Boulanger, A. (1970). *Le génie grec dans la religion*. Albin Michel. P. 270-271.

<sup>233</sup> Bayet, J. (1957). *Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine*. SFIL, Histoire et religion, p. 58.

<sup>234</sup> International symposium (1994) *La Tunisie au miroir de sa communauté juive*, les juifs de la tunisie Quelques repères historiques, retrieved on 23.01.2018 from [www.revues-plurielles.org/\\_uploads/pdf/9\\_10\\_20.pdf](http://www.revues-plurielles.org/_uploads/pdf/9_10_20.pdf) p 1.

<sup>235</sup> Lehmann. Y. (1989). *La religion romaine*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2<sup>e</sup> éd, p. 11.

religious arena. This religious shift did not reach the communities living in plains and hills of the country outback, who believed that there should be a supreme god over little deities and that Judaism might be a way out of their religious frustration. The inhabitants of Africa proconsularis were spiritually hungry for a message of hope and a confirmation of God's call, and Christianity was the spiritual relief that solved their religious dithering and doubt.<sup>236</sup> Earliest records, epitaphs, and votive inscriptions indicate that Christianity reached North Africa in the middle of the second century, but it is very likely that the new faith came to Africa proconsularis a century before. In his Apologetics written around 197 AC, Tertulian noted that Christianity had deeply spread inside the country and reached pre-Saharan areas before the end of the second century.<sup>237</sup> The emancipation from pagan institutional structures was a long process, and the recognition of the Christian Church was an unprecedented bloody phase in the region's history. By setting up in North Africa, Christianity faced an imperialist refusal, a deep popular opposition, and was accused of having destabilized the society and torn apart the religious fabric. The State reaction was excessively violent, discriminatory, and genocidal since it classified the new converts in the rank of religious threat, removed them from public and domestic activities, and put them into isolation.

The main issue was that the converted Christians refused to participate in religious ceremonies and services and abstained from exercising agricultural trades to provide offerings (animals) to sacrificial sessions. All the same, the drop of water that has made the vase overflow was their non-participation in religious observance and teaching and refusal to take military oath and serving the empire's army. The main reason for this outright refusal was the compelling military requirement to capture, injure, and kill innocents during the battles, which represents a transgression of the sixth commandment. Despite this political maladjustment, Christianity has quickly established itself in North Africa and experienced an effervescence attested by the assemblies of 220 BC. This growing religious phenomenon and new institutional organization called "*Church*" awed the Aboriginal peoples living in urban and rural areas because they were not used to similar religious and priestly fraternity. Christianity united several races by a bond of faith and not of blood, contrary to Judaism identified in race and blood rather than conviction and practice.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Green, M. (1970). *Evangelism in the Early Church*, London, p. 135-190

<sup>237</sup> Tertulian is a Latin writer from a Romanized Berber family who converted to Christianity at the end of the second century and became the most eminent theologian of Carthage. Julien. C. A. (1951). *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord*, P ayot, 2001, p. 226.

<sup>238</sup> Latourette, K. S. (1945). *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. I: The First Five Centuries, Eyre & Spottiswood, p. 251.

The rupture with the official religion of the empire and shift to Christianity went hand in hand with the emergence of confessional groups adopting a new moral compass that contradicted Roman religious rules. This fact overcame the political borderlines and disrupted the religious arena, which displeased emperors who launched violent persecutions, torture, and the death penalty against all the converted accused to put the empire's religious stability, unity, and sovereignty in danger. Nonetheless, far from alleviating the growing prosperity of Christianity and spreading fear throughout the population, this violent backlash and mass execution led to the efflorescence of resistance movements and martyrs' memorial such as those of Perpetua and Felicity. As long as Christianity propagated, the wave of persecution rolled across the inland, reached rebel regions as Scillium, and gave famous martyrs such as Namphamon, Madaure, and Miggin. After the Decian edict in 250, this bloody crackdown against Christians compounded and triggered violent suppression and forced followers of the Christian faith to offer sacrifices and pray for the salvation of the emperor.<sup>239</sup> The obvious and catastrophic consequence of this edict led to mass-extermination massacres that divided the Christian community into two parts; those who refused emperor salvation were persecuted and those who renounced their faith and yielded to Decius demands received a precarious status (Lapsi) and could not fit back into Roman society. Upon coming to power, Senator Valerian deployed a luring tactic to weaken the Christian community. Thus, instead of punishing the followers of Christianity, he banished, reduced to slavery, and executed all Christian leaders to completely blow out the light of this faith.<sup>240</sup> Valerian ordered to exile or put in forced labour all bishop, cleric, or figure of Christianity who refused the Roman salvation. More bloodshed and more suffering marked the year 258 since many clerics, such as Cyprian and St. Flavien, were sentenced to death and were beheaded in public.<sup>241</sup> Things began to change when Valerian's son Gallienus came to power in 260, given his policy and tolerance toward Christians. He issued the first official declaration of tolerance in the Christian history of North Africa and therefore provided peace, stability, and reconciliation with the Church. This edict ensured a religious cohabitation and understanding between the different communities and enhanced the broadening of Christianity in the region.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Decius was a Roman Emperor from 249 to 251, known as Trajan Decius, obliged everyone to pray for the Roman gods and provide a sacrifice to the well-being of the Emperor. Frend, W. H. C. (1984). *The rise of Christianity*. Fortress Press. p. 319-320.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p 326.

<sup>241</sup> St Cyprian is a Berber convert to Christianity who became bishop of Carthage and Father of the African Church. With Saint Augustine, he is one of the greatest witnesses of the doctrine of the Latin Church of the first centuries. Lodi, E. (1996). *Les saints du calendrier romain*. éd. Médiaspaul, Montréal, p .289.

<sup>242</sup> This edict of tolerance specifies that Christians are not going to be persecuted for their commitment to the practice and traditions related to their religion, so it formalized the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire and not its adherence to political power.

At the beginning, Christianity and Judaism agreed and lived on peaceably good terms. The proof is that the Gospel was first preached in synagogues and Christians were at first buried in Jewish necropolis. However, in line with the strengthening of Christianity under the reign of Septimius Severus, this harmony did not last long and faced a few religious motions aimed at dominating the religious arena. Tertullian's narratives provide a snapshot of this religious disagreement and leadership confrontation between Christians and Jews, who were despised for their worship and tradition. In the treaty against Jews (*Adversus Judaeos*), Tertullian mentioned that the social tension was strained between these communities, and as time went by, jealousy emerged, misunderstanding appeared, and a glaring religious division and disharmony took shape.<sup>243</sup> After Constantine's edict, Jews' religious, social, and financial conditions further worsened because of the hostile attitude and pressure exerted by the church. For more than two and a half centuries, Christians were despised, oppressed, and treated as inferior citizens because of the Roman autocratic policy. This discriminative policy triggered an abstinent resistance, religious robustness, and harsh belief, which provoked significant empathy among the Aboriginal population. The Amazigh were suffering the same fate of inferiority and discrimination, which lured them into adopting this new faith. However, contrary to what had been expected, church officialization gave a different insight on Christianity. The persecution and sufferance had calmed down and consequently conversion began to slow and dried up completely later on. Indeed, the resilient aspect of Christians and their ultimate sacrifice for their beliefs were the main drivers that impressed the Aboriginals and drew them to Christianity and its disappearance led to the attenuation of this religious admiration and awe. This confidence crisis deepened after the defeat of the Donatists against the Catholic church and provoked a social unrest and wave of oppositions that stood against the African church its religious lines and spirituality. This religious and political disorder set the stage for Vandal invasion in 439, who quickly inflicted sanctions on bishops and confiscated all church property.

### **2.3. The Religious Scene During the Paleo-Christian Period and Middle Ages**

Given the religious, social, and political pressure that prevailed North Africa and the diminishing of Roman military capacity, Germanic mercenaries and Danube's tribes undertook attacks against Roman Carthage, caused widespread damage, and succeeded to seize control of Africa Proconsularis. African Christians shared with the Goths a hatred of Rome, and because of that, the latter showed clemency and did not destroy Christian property in times of war. It is important to note, however, that despite the attenuation of persecution under the Vandals, the

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<sup>243</sup> Tertullien, *Apologétique*, chapitre 7.

cult of the martyrs started to mount up again in the fifth century with the extent of believing in a glorious vision of life after death and in the promise of lordly recompense. Thus, religious figures such as Cyprian and Augustine who sacrificed their lives for their belief and community obtained honorific titles of “*Saint*” assigned by the Catholic Church in recognition of their commitment and sacrifice. Consequently, religious intermediaries appeared in African spiritual reasoning considering that praying to God through apostles and martyrs would be more effective than directly praying without an intermediary.<sup>244</sup>

### **2.3.1. Repression of the Catholic Church: Vandals, Donatism, and Arianism**

After this geopolitical shift, Amazigh and Donatists expected that the new conqueror would bring further religious harmony and political stability, nevertheless, their religious needs and expectations were largely disappointed.<sup>245</sup> On the contrary, the Vandals increased the religious repression and the decimating of indigenous populations, which led to a deep crisis of faith and popular discontent. The only religious communities that lived peace and harmony with the Vandals were the Jews, who genuinely wanted to come out of the Roman grip and helped Vandal troops during the conquest of Justinian. This political stance for the benefit of the Vandals allowed the Jews to freely practice their beliefs without any constraint.

The Vandals were afraid of a religious resistance capable of arousing the urge to rebellion growth inside the empire; therefore, they ransacked a large part of Christian properties, burned the churches, and immediately dispatched all bishops in ships to Rome or burned them alive. In his book *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique*, Victor de Vita stressed the cruelty of the Vandals’ persecution that put an end to nuns’ lives and repatriated five thousand lay clerics to pre-Saharan areas.<sup>246</sup> To bridge this religious gap and ensure an internal supervision of the churches, the Vandals elected their own bishops who prayed in a Germanic dialect and made from it the official language of religious institutions. From that point, Arianism became the official faith of North Africa.<sup>247</sup> The doctrine of Arius stressed the unity and uniqueness of God but denied the notion of trinity and the self-existence of the Christ who was deemed as a mutable person. This heresy contradicted the foundation of Christianity, which displeased the African clergy that showed an outright refusal to adopt this religious motion and to abide by the rules set out by the Arian Church and Carthage patriarch. Despite their refusal, he was

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<sup>244</sup> Daniel, D. (2008). *L’héritage chrétien en Afrique du Nord*, Une étude historique à partir du premier siècle jusqu’au Moyen Âge, Editions Tamaris, p 272.

<sup>245</sup> Frend, W. H. C. (1952). *The Donatist Church*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 297-299.

<sup>246</sup> Vitensis, V., de Vita, V., & Lancel, S. (2002). *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique* (Vol. 368). Les Belles Lettres, p. 10-404.

<sup>247</sup> Arianism form of Unitarian theology that only assert the transcendence and divinity of God and rejects the notion of the Trinity. Berndt, G. M., & Steinacher, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, p. 21-27

virulent toward Christians and established a freedom of religion to the Catholics. Genseric had more mercy than his successor Huneric who punished any aspect of religious difference.

In 484, Huneric summoned 466 Catholic leaders in a conference to discuss a religious arrangement, but his intent was to reunite, chastise, punish, and kill them.<sup>248</sup> The Catholic leaders caught in the trap were thunderously condemned, 90 of them were put to death, and consequently, Christians were banished, sold as slaves, or forced into exile. Huneric's atrocious and dreadful policy toward Christians did not end with his death, it exacerbated with his two nephews Gunthamund and Thrasamund who condemned more than 120 bishops in exile and crushed the Catholic clergy with taxes and criminal fines. Under Hilderic's reign from 523 to 530, these episodes of communal and religious conflict subsided and tension decreased due to the king's smart policy, tolerance, mercy, and truce with the Catholics. Hilderic appointed a Catholic bishop to take charge of the religious organization in Carthage, and therefore an important part of the Vandals started to convert to Catholicism. After this peace accord, Arianism witnessed a weakening of religious commitment; meanwhile, the Catholic Church blossomed because of the Vandals' military and religious attenuation. Taking advantage of this social and political turmoil, the Catholics petitioned Justinian to save them from the Vandals' repression and barbarism. In the meantime, the Amazigh, also victims of the Vandals' brutality, attacked the Vandals' military regrouping point and created proper conditions for Justinian to come and deliver the coup de grace. It did not take much time for Carthage to succumb to the power of the Byzantine Empire. After the attack of General Belisarius on the southern coast of Carthage in 533, Tricamarum was defeated in September of the same year and lost control of the empire.<sup>249</sup> Arian bishops fled across the border and left behind a hundred years of Arianism captivity and religious massacre. This war reshuffled the cards and restored a new power in North Africa.

### **2.3.2. Catholicism Crisis Under the Byzantines: Rival Confessions and Religious Rupture**

Contrary to the Vandals, the Byzantines avoided following the Vandals' preceding fallacy and terror campaigns that sowed fear and panic among the population. They rather sought to conclude peace agreements with the Catholics to ensure a social stability and to reduce the religious hatred that dominated the society. As a first step, they returned the confiscated religious properties to their owners, named the Catholic bishops at the head of urban churches,

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<sup>248</sup> Daniel 2008, p 220-230.

<sup>249</sup> Yousif, E. I. (2002). *Les chroniqueurs syriaques*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 75.

and attempted to arrive at some understanding with other religious communities. Nonetheless, this smart move enticed only the Catholics and suited their religious need and advantage, contrary to the Donatists, Arianists, and Amazigh who saw that their situation had not improved and appeared to have deteriorated. Through the Council of 534 BC, the byzantine sought to find solution for this religious impasse between the communities and improve the social and economic policies in Carthage. However, contrary to what was expected, the Council aggravated the religious dissension and established a hostile policy toward Jews and pagans, considered as heretics, and forced them to convert to Christianity as a punishment for their alliance with the Vandals.<sup>250</sup> Justinian destroyed the synagogue, uprooted the Jews, and sought to annihilate this religious minority for the sake of his belief.<sup>251</sup> Under this repression, Jews fled the coastal towns and took refuge with the Amazigh tribes in the mountains. The rest of the population were spiritually disoriented and fuelled by a religious ignorance due to the lack of religious instruction and Bible teaching and the detrimental impact of Arius's theological thinking.<sup>252</sup>

However, instead of finding a solution for this religious vacuum, the Byzantines ushered in a period of expensive and onerous constructions such as basilicas, palaces, and baths, which rubbed salt in the wounds of the Christians thirsting for spirituality and religious orientation. The situation further deteriorated, the social and financial disorder grew, and tension arose due to the overwhelming taxes imposed on Christians to build these monuments. Moreover, the Church moved progressively away from the foundation of Christianity and tolerated penances, praying for the dead, and receiving forgiveness for money, which generated a suitable environment for the emergence of new doctrines. The disagreement about religious leadership as well as the discrepancy in religious conviction between the Catholics, Arians, and Donatists curtailed the Christian faith and made it lose part of its religious enlightenment and symbolism. To fill the religious void and gain greater understanding of the precepts of Christianity, the province of Africa adopted the way of the Church of Rome, which in turn led to the shape of evangelism. However, instead of helping the Church manage this crisis, this religious orientation further entrenched rival confessions and religious hatred between the followers of Arianism, Catholicism, Donatism, and Montanism. Consequently, in the mid-seventh century, the province of Africa was torn apart by anarchy, theological and heretical quarrels, fights

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<sup>250</sup> Justinian considered that religious unity is the only way to insure imperial unity that is why he fought against all the sustenance of paganism, Judaism and heterodox doctrines. Tate, G. (2004). *Justinien: l'épopée de l'Empire d'Orient, 527-565*. Fayard.p 399.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. p 409.

<sup>252</sup> Daniel 2008, p 278.

against schism, and Monophysism. This chaotic environment facilitated the task of Arab irruption, who saw in the north of Africa a prosperous land for more glories and spoils.

### 2.3.3. The Islamization of Ifriqiya

The Arab conquest was not a result of a heroic fight to get the Africans out of a distressing situation, on the contrary; this conquest was, as with all colonial forces, a logical follow-up of military operations with missionary aspects.<sup>253</sup> The invasion started in 647 with the military assault of Ibn Sa'd against the Byzantine army in *Sefutela* and managed to kill the Byzantine Exarch of Africa (Gregory the Patrician).<sup>254</sup> After this defeat, the Byzantines paid large compensation sums for the Arabs to retreat to Egypt and to sign a treaty of peace. However, and despite a second booty sent to Egypt, this truce did not last very long and was broken by the expedition of Okba ibn Nafaa that put an end to the byzantine presence in North Africa and named Kairouan as the capital of the Islamic province of Ifriqiya.<sup>255</sup> The Amazigh did not welcome the Muslims warmly and showed an outright resistance to the new faith. This resilience was not only religious, but it had also a military aspect conducted by the Amazigh leader Koceila. Although the Christian warlord Koceila fell into the trap of Muslims and was tortured for a long time, he took revenge on Oqba ibn Nafaa, killed him, and seized Kairouan for 5 years. In 688, Zuhair bin Qais Al Balawi put down this rebellion, killed Koceila, and marked the death of the Christians' religious uprising.<sup>256</sup>

Nonetheless, the Amazigh insurgency passed under the banner of Judaism with the tribe of Jeraoua and its queen priestess Kahena. She was the first and major female military figure we know in the history of Africa who fought for the faith and ethnicity.<sup>257</sup> Kahena managed to rally several tribes and increased her military strength, which allowed her to fight the Muslims for more than three years without any defeat. However, in view of their religious resistance, The Amazigh experienced in the ninth century a bloody crackdown and were mutilated, enslaved, or killed en masse. Scholars of history stress the fierceness of the mass slaughter and cruel situation of the Amazigh during the Muslim conquest that according to Ibn Khaldun, at one time totalled 180,000 dead in a single conflict.<sup>258</sup> At the beginning, given the multiple religious

<sup>253</sup> Camps, G. (1983). *Comment la Berbérie est devenue le Maghreb arabe*. Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée, 35(1), p 7-24.

<sup>254</sup> Diehl, C. (1896). *L'Afrique byzantine: histoire de la domination byzantine en Afrique (533-709)* (Vol. 2). E. Leroux., p. 557-558.

<sup>255</sup> Talbi, M. (1966). *L'Émirat aghlabide, 184-296, 800-909, histoire politique*. Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient A.-Maisonneuve, p. 21.

<sup>256</sup> El Hareir, I., & Mbaye, R. (Eds.). (2011). *The spread of Islam Throughout the World* (Vol. 3). UNESCO, p.309.

<sup>257</sup> Jurquet-Bouhoune, B., & Jurquet, J. (2007). *Femmes algériennes: de la Kahina au Code de la famille: guerres-traditions-luttes, à travers nos lectures et souvenirs*. Le Temps des cerises., p. 26

<sup>258</sup> Khaldūn 1852, p 218.

doctrines, the Aboriginal people deemed Islam as heresy or a new form of Christianity that would soon disappear. Nonetheless, they shifted under pressure, converted to Islam out of fear or interest, and remained surreptitiously faithful to Christianity. For three centuries, Jewish and Christian communities were not oppressed or forced to convert to Islam, on the contrary, they had lived with Muslims in a peaceful coexistence.<sup>259</sup> This massive Islamization could not with a wave of a magic wand erase all prevailing religious and spiritual tradition, mainly because of the language constraint and deep commitment to Christianity.<sup>260</sup> For C. Courtois, it makes no sense to imagine a complete Islamization of the Maghreb within a short period. He claims that the traditional animist beliefs and polytheistic conviction persisted throughout the Islamic rule.<sup>261</sup>

To propagate the tenets of Islam, the newcomer needed a gradual transition from the old religious scene. Thus, they established a linguistic reconfiguration to compel Arabic in the idiomatic landscape and a religious incentive through Islamic instruction and Koranic teaching to earn the confidence of the population. Regarding this matter, it bears noting that the Islamization of Ifriqiya was achieved in less than two centuries and that the Arabization took more than thirteen centuries and could not be completed. The process of Islamization was mainly urban and first took root in coastal and provincial cities, suburbs, and urban fringes and did not press into deep rural areas. It reached its peak under the Fatimid dynasty (909-969 AD) and gave a major boost to Arabic between 913 and 1010 in the Regency of Tunis.<sup>262</sup> By contrast, spreading Islam among Amazigh was extremely complex because of their social and geographic isolation and refusal to change their faith once again. The Amazigh saw in Islam a similar form of Arianism charged with theological nuances, practical worship, and ease in conversion. Moreover, they realized that pronouncing the Shahada (Testimony of Faith) was enough to avoid paying taxes and being excluded from the society, which boosted their convention. There is no doubt that Amazigh were not firstly convinced of Islam to be their religion and abjured twelve times the Islamic greed before converting definitively into Islam.<sup>263</sup> Even their tribal leader did not convert by conviction but rather by interest to ensure political stability and avoid paying *djizya* or being held hostage.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Marçais, G. (1946). *La Berbérie musulmane et l'Orient au Moyen. Age*, Editions, p. 30-40.

<sup>260</sup> Camps, G. (1995). *Les Berbères: mémoire et identité*. Errance, p. 135-137.

<sup>261</sup> Courtois, C. (1945). *Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du nord. Remarques sur les communautés chrétiennes d'Afrique au XI siècle*, Revue historique, 195 (Fasc. 2), p. 97-122.

<sup>262</sup> Bulliet, R. W. (1979). *Conversion to Islam in the medieval period: an essay in quantitative history*, p. 90-100.

<sup>263</sup> Khaldūn, I (1863). *Prolégomènes*, Slane, tome I. p. 215

<sup>264</sup> Djezja is an annual tax collected on non-Muslim (dhimmis) pubescent men and fixed in relation to the financial capacity of the taxpayer. Haleem, M. A. (2010). *Understanding the Qur'an: themes and style*. Bloomsbury Publishing, p.70-79.

Unlike the previous conqueror, the Muslims did not launch a fierce religious crackdown and persecute those who opposed Islam, on the contrary, they tried to persuade people to be Muslims, and those who refused to convert were subjected to the status of protected “*dhimmi*”.<sup>265</sup> This arrangement conferred many benefits to the Christians and Jews, who had no interest in accessing public function, given their area of activity (trade and craft). This finding is further verified by epigraphic and funeral inscriptions found in Kairouan dating to the 12th century, assert that the Christian community lived in lofty spirituality, and maintained their religious practices and feasts without any constraints.<sup>266</sup> Further evidence that confirms the Christian effervescence and religious harmony under Islamic rule was the survival of the official liturgical language of the church (Latin) by dint of the religious retention to Christianity.<sup>267</sup> The Jewish community also acquired a local identity (Yahūd Ifrīqiya) and lived in peace in Kairouan and Jerba. In the Zirid dynasty, their condition improved following the appointment of a Jew as a community leader to represent them at public hearing. A major characteristic of Islam in the Maghreb was the spiritual quest to encounter “*Allah*” through mediation and mysticism, which gave rise to the phenomenon of “*Maraboutism*”. This form of pious devotion and contemplative retreat does not derive from the rules of Coran but rather borrows values from asceticism and animism aimed initially at achieving holiness (*al 'awliyâ'*).<sup>268</sup> Indeed, “*Maraboutism*” was not a creation of Islam but rather formed a continuation of local traditions charged with the significance of possession, devotional, and spiritual edification. African Maraboutism has been highly influenced by Berber beliefs that put great emphasis on divine contact, veneration, and sorcery. The only difference between Berber and Muslim concepts lay in the fact that Arab’s mystical confinement and exercises of piety morphed over time into a guard, military duty, and community responsibility. This commitment became a major trend in the eighth century following the construction of *Ribats* (religious centre for mystics) and full effervescence of spiritual warfare (moral struggle against ego and temptation). These centres of religious studies and mystical experiences spread quickly across the Sahara to West Africa and greatly contributed to facilitating the Islamization of rural areas.

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<sup>265</sup> Dhimmi are the person who have the right to keep their faith, remain on the territory without exercising public functions and having a legal protection with a condition to pay djizya. Glenn, H. P. (2007). *A common law tradition: The ethic of adjudication*. Legal Traditions in the World. p. 218–219

<sup>266</sup> Mahjoubi, A. (1966). *Nouveau témoignage épigraphique sur la communauté chrétienne de Kairouan au XIe siècle*. Africa, I, p. 89-95.

<sup>267</sup> Canard, M. (1959). *Les travaux de T. Lewicki concernant le Maghreb*, Revue africaine, t. CIII, p. 360-371.

<sup>268</sup> Holy people who have spiritual power that allows them to be close to God.

In the twelfth and thirteenth century, things began to change in the Maghreb after the emergence of Muslim orthodoxy and Khajidite schism, which, despite the small numbers of their followers, triggered many ideological violent and bloody confrontations. This period marked the attenuation of the African Christianity because of the detrimental impact of Hilalian and Almohade conquests that destroyed the stability and harmonious understanding between the communities. This religious dimming can also be explained by many social integration issues due to the non-adaptation of Christians with the dominant culture.<sup>269</sup> Under the Almohads, the religious and ethnic repression escalated, tolerance diminished, churches closed for their non-conformity to Islam, and Jews and Christians were forced to convert to Islam or perish.<sup>270</sup> Furthermore, the churches started to preach for Islam to acculturate other religious communities with Arab-Islamic culture and thought.

#### **2.4. From Ifriqiya to the Regency of Tunis: A Religious and Ethno-Sociological Transformation**

With the Fatimids, the disagreement, religious, and moral confusion accentuated after having put an end to Sunnism and adopting the Shiism with Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi.<sup>271</sup> This ideological imposition went hand in hand with an aggressive taxation policy, which gave rise to religious and economic problems and urged opposition throughout the country. The frustration and social distress did not stop there; it worsened with the splitting of the country into two parts: a northern part controlled by the Zirids and the hinterland controlled by the Hilaliens and Normans. This disorder brought grave harm to the people who desperately chose to leave the conflict areas (cities) and took refuge in the mountains after the fall of Kairouan. Meanwhile, the Normans seized the cities of Djerba, Sfax, and Sousse and relaunched a new process of Christianization with Roger II who imposed harsher and even deadly punishments on Muslims.<sup>272</sup> Additionally, the wave of migration from the east and Sicily added to the complexity of the political and religious turmoil and compounded the ideological fundamentalism. Nonetheless, after the dethronement of the Normand in 1159, the religious bloodshed ended, and the country emerged from its turmoil thanks to a political unification. This religious spring had a direct beneficial impact on economics, commerce, and social and cultural development. As a matter of logic, the improving of life circumstances opened the doors again to a new wave of religious vibrancy,

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<sup>269</sup> Talbi, M. (1990). *Le Christianisme maghrébin: de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition*. Michael Gervers, Ramzi Jibran Bikazi (éd.), *Conversion and Continuity. Indigenous Christian Communities, Communities in Islamic Lands, VIII to XVIII centuries*, Toronto, p. 331-332.

<sup>270</sup> Dufourcq, C. E. (1978). *La coexistence des chrétiens et des musulmans dans Al-Andalus et dans le Maghrib du Xe siècle*. Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public, 9 (1), p. 209-224.

<sup>271</sup> Lacoste-Dujardin, C., & Lacoste, Y. (1991). *L'Etat du Maghreb*. La Découverte, p. 44.

<sup>272</sup> Grenon, M. (2008). *Conflits sud-italiens et royaume normand (1016-1198)*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 345.

cultural fruitfulness, and assimilation, which promoted the Arabic language across the country and gave back Islam its initial lustre. Through an ethnic and religious intermingling, the relationship between the Arabs and Berbers started to become mutually beneficial and engaged a two-way interaction in terms of their conviction. In some cases, the Arabs who spoke Arabic underwent a form of inverted assimilation (Berberized) due to their close vicinity to the nomads and learned by implication their language. The common thread that united the two ethnic groups was their similar practices in the area of agriculture, animal, and plant domestication and pastoralism, which facilitated their fusion, integration, and harmonization. The assimilation and acquisition of religious and linguistic knowledge was an essential step toward social understanding. Indeed, through a legal fiction, the Amazigh had their rights guaranteed and respected. Several members of the nomadic tribes were rewarded for their loyalty to Islam and dedication for the sovereign. They were promoted to the rank of "*Sharif*" and became protectors of the faith and Islamic tradition.<sup>273</sup> During this period, Ifriqiya enjoyed unprecedented peace, stability, and intense religious, linguistic, and literary development with the Arabization of the majority of nomadic tribes in central and northern Tunisia.<sup>274</sup>

Under Hafsid rule (1236-1574), the regency of Tunis saw the start of the worst social and religious decadence since the Muslim conquest. The blurring of moral standards and religious decay started, anarchy and lawlessness ruled, and the death rate progressed with the epidemic (plague in 1384). These factors led to social and economic chaos but what exacerbated the situation was the massive exodus of Andalusian Jews and Muslims who sought refuge in Tunis after the fall of Granada under Catholic rule. The migrants who escaped the collective punishment and repression in Andalusia was the last straw that broke the camel's back because they provoked a deep dismay and political, financial, and religious deadlocks. The Hafsids' ruler lost control over the regency and by rash decision authorized the Ottoman privateers to use the ports of La Goulette and Djerba as naval bases. This premature decision for the Ottoman side displeased Spain and triggered violent confrontation with opposing force to control maritime traffic in the Mediterranean Sea and invade the Maghreb. In 1534, the Ottoman took control of Tunis, but it did not last long. Twelve months later, Spain conquered the regency through strength of arms after the famous battle of Charles V.<sup>275</sup> As expected, Spain imposed its state religion in the national religious arena and Christianity blossomed anew, churches were

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<sup>273</sup> Sharif is a traditional Arab title meaning noble. Camps 1983, p. 7-24.

<sup>274</sup> Marçais, W. (1956). *Comment l'Afrique du Nord a été arabisée. II L'arabisation des campagnes*. Annales de l'Institut des langues orientales d'Alger, 14, p. 7-9.

<sup>275</sup> Lemarchand, P. (1994). *L'Afrique et l'Europe: atlas du XXe siècle*. Editions Complexe, p. 238-239.

full, and Tunis was going to be Christianized again. This religious effervescence lasted only forty years and the situation changed on the day the Ottomans returned in 1574. With the Husaynids, progress began to be made in the country thanks to a religious and social emancipation process. Ahmed Bey I enriched and strengthened the state policy, afforded a large autonomy in relation to economic, religious, and social organization, and launched the first process of modernization by abolishing slavery and introducing a new Constitution.

The identity matrix in Tunisia reflected a deep ethnic and religious mobility between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations that could be seen in linguistic, cultural, traditional, religious, artisanal, and architectural assimilation that varied between Turkish, Andalusian, Italian and French character. This larger openness toward others' culture and faiths also had its drawbacks since it was strictly urban and provoked a full social and religious isolation in rural and mountainous areas, which served as bastions and refuges in case of religious persecution. The blatant disregard, social marginalization, religious intolerance, pressure, and adjustment problems with conquerors' religions and cultures led to the withdrawal of the Amazigh in unpopulated areas to avoid mingling with foreign culture and convictions. For that precise reason, they acquired a strong religious and linguistic resistance that overcame invaders' looting and persecution.

#### **2.4.1. Amazigh Ethnic and Religious Resistance**

Given its dynamic, plural, and diverse character, the Amazigh culture represents the heart of Tunisian identity that managed to withstand forced assimilation and imposed beliefs. Through deep commitments to their religious creed, tradition, collective imagination, and language, the Amazigh ethno-cultural core has persisted for thousands of years due to their tribal, pastoral, and nomadic livelihoods and social diversity (nomadic and sedentary). The Amazigh are the product of a lengthy process of hybridization that began through a blending with the Phoenician component, which gave birth to the appellation of "*Libou*" or Libyans.<sup>276</sup> Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century idealizes the Amazigh population for its strong alliance, nobility and spirit generosity, loyalty to commitment and treaties, and above all its piety, penitence, and charity.<sup>277</sup> He claims that their social structure rests on two pillars: the family as a first organizing circle that takes charge of small concerns and the tribe as a more powerful social circle that carries out political and religious functions, and these forms together make a federation or kingdom. Their political organization is identical to the political hierarchy of ethnic minorities, which is

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<sup>276</sup> Fantar, M. H. (2008 Mai). *L'identité carthaginoise est faite de couches multiples*, Les Cahiers de Science & Vie, n° 104, p. 25

<sup>277</sup> Khaldūn 1852, p. 184.

generally composed of a council of elders headed by a wise patriarch (may be a female such as “*El Khahina*”) and assisted by several members in taking the votes.

Despite their religious unity, the only drawback that characterized their culture and lifestyle was their fragmentation into divided tribes living in small gatherings, which has never allowed them to merge and form a cross-regional alliance throughout history. Their social and geographical aspect was clearly detrimental to build a force because they chose to live close to their places of birth in oasis, valley, or village, which reflects a sense of satisfaction with this seclusion. In this respect, one specific point needs to be flagged, which is that their identity cannot be defined by religion, but rather to territory, history, and language. The strongest player in the Amazigh political and social arena is the customary law “*Azref*”, which was separate and independent of religious jurisdiction. In spite of all colonial rule and religious pressures that have marked the north of Africa, every attempt at rapprochement or interruption of their religious unity has failed, given their unwavering commitment to ancestral tradition. This deep commitment to the tribe and collective belonging has a genealogical and linguistic dimension that feeds on a traditional irreducibility of great significance in Amazigh thinking.<sup>278</sup>

Despite the significant Eastern influence on the Amazigh, it remains a fundamental historical and anthropological error to consider them as Arabs because their ancestral tradition and belief never ceased to exist.<sup>279</sup> They even relied on the seductive power of their women to lessen tension, expedite peace, and guarantee stability for their tribes by charming Arab leaders, as in the cases of Ibn Rustom and Idris who married Amazigh women. That being said, this reflects enormous powers of absorption of other culture and the ability to change other beliefs in order to adapt their conviction and suits their traditions. They have reshaped several religious beliefs and traditions, so they conform their ideology, conviction, and traditional way of life, whilst keeping a strong attachment to the animism, sorcery, and religious intermediaries. This distortion was not only religious, but affected the conquerors’ languages in creating separate linguistic form and dialects that deformed the original structures of the tongue. This deformation was blatant with Islam which faced major adjustment to suit Amazigh vision and animist imagination. More specifically, the Amazigh married an infinite number of women instead of four, prayed ten times a day instead of five, did not fast during Ramadan but two

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<sup>278</sup> Thaálbi 2000, p 12

<sup>279</sup> Barreau, J. C., & Bigot, G. (2007). *Toute la géographie du monde*. Fayard, p. 100.

months later (Rajab), and replaced the Arabic appellation of God, "*Allah*", with the Tamazight appellation "*Yakouch*".<sup>280</sup>

The distortion was less deep with Judaism, which, unlike other religions, did not seek to expand in North Africa and did not impose any rule inconsistent with their conviction. The Jews had no plan to impose their belief, tradition, and language; they only sought for an environment of peace and security away from religious repression. The peaceable intentions of the Jewish community provoked solidarity and compassion among the Amazigh, which has favoured a mutual cultural, linguistic, and religious exchange between them. The Amazigh felt much closer to Judaism than to other religions, and it is for this reason that Judaism and Hebrew have undergone very little deformation. It should be remembered that the wave distortion did not impede the integration of Amazigh in the social and political arena; on the contrary, several tribes, such as "*Meşmouda*", have played a significant role in the expansion of many empires. This strong capacity for flexibility, adaptability, and openness to the outside leaned on their peaceful nature, desire to know and understand others, and has favoured their master of multiple arts and knowledge. Despite their withdrawal, a considerable part of them attended Phoenician, Roman, and Islamic schools and managed to master Punic, Latin, and Arabic, learned further artisanship, and enhanced their agricultural expertise. According to the literary resources of Manilus or Florus, these tribes were mostly bilingual or trilingual and had an enormous cultural richness and intellectual potential.<sup>281</sup> Over the last centuries, the Amazigh situation has not improved, quite the contrary, they have become an oppressed minority that suffered under French and Tunisian rule. The policy of neoliberal modernization carried out by the Tunisian government deemed their tribal life and remoteness as a barrier that hinders Tunisia's development and have to be discarded. As part of a monolithic vision, Tunisian policy shows acceptance to social and ethnic interbreeding but implicitly rejects all aspects of plurality. In other words, the regulations of ethnic and religious communities seem democratic but concretely play against all form of plurality, which has created several forms of discrimination. The State treated and still deals with "*Amazighity*" as an outdated rurality and sedentariness that must disappear. The question that arises here is how far Tunisia's policy has damaged the Amazigh community.

#### **2.4.2. The Religious and Ethnic Marginalization of the Amazigh**

In the absence of official statistics, it is difficult to measure exact numbers of the Amazigh populations in Tunisia. However, according to the Human Rights Council's universal periodic

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<sup>280</sup> Daniel 2008, p 312.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

review, the Amazigh population stands at less than one million persons, which is about 10% of Tunisia's population.<sup>282</sup> That being said, Bourguiba's social reform has forced a large part of them to immigrate to Europe, whereas the rest of the communities have chosen to settle in southern Tunisia (Gafsa, Douz, Tozeur, Djerid), right next to the Algerian borders. Unlike Morocco and Algeria that give cardinal importance to Amazighs' beliefs, tradition, and customs, their heritage and way of life have been seen in Tunisia in a pejorative way, were stripped of its religious and cultural significance, and became a tourist facet and folklore aspect. This way of forcible modernization impeded the practice and transmission of their language and downplayed their culture and belief to a family heirloom and to an unacceptable identity, which has no place in the society. Bourguiba made no secret of his admiration for the Amazigh, but he flatly refused their tribal specificities deemed as a considerable religious and social risk for Tunisia's unity and cultural revival. By fear of the contagion of the tribal organization ravaging in Libya and leading to deadly confrontations between tribes, the Tunisian State followed a firm, stringent policy with regard to practices occurring on a tribal basis.<sup>283</sup>

- As a first step, the teaching of their language "*Tamazigh*" has been prohibited in all public institutions. Thus, from 1996 onward, the bilingualism that was spoken in many cities such as Chenini and Douiret began to dispense because of a forced Arabization, which made from these groups a linguistic minority.<sup>284</sup> This political will reflected a discrimination on linguistic and religious grounds because it managed to rip up the "*Tamazigh*", which is necessary for the fulfilment of their religious practices.
- As a second step, the State strengthened the rural exodus in the south and forced the Amazigh who lived in mountains and fortified villages to leave their troglodytes and "*Ksour*" and to settle in newly built cities.
- As a third step, the State launched a social and religious repression using surveillance, intimidation, and restriction. Moreover, it undermined their confessional beliefs and despised their culture by banning Amazigh names and worship.

As a direct result of this discriminatory policy, Tunisia became the most compliant country in terms of linguistic purity and homogeneity in the Maghreb with more than 92% of the

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<sup>282</sup> Conseil des Droits de l'Homme des Nations Unies (November 2011) *Les Amazighs (Berbères) de Tunisie : Marginalisation, négation, occultation*, Contribution du CMA à l'EPU concernant la Tunisie, p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> Hamdi, E. (2011 September). *Les Amazighs sortent des oubliettes de l'histoire*, *Réalités*, n°1341, p 44.

<sup>284</sup> Souriau, C. (1980). *Structuration de la société par le choix de langues en Tunisie*, Les classes moyennes au Maghreb, CNRS, Cahiers du CRESM, p. 10-42.

population speaking Arabic (Tunisian dialect). However, what is puzzling is that the State pretends that this community did not claim its “*Amazighness*” and has completely integrated the national identity based on Islam and Arabism. The State denies any racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination or adversity with ethnics and religious groups; on the contrary, it claims that they are living in freedom according to the law. However, in real terms, the practice and belief of Amazigh are continuously declining and will eventually disappear in this pattern. The National Pact of 1988 provides an indication of the state denial of Amazigh’s right to cultural existence and shows its obliteration of their social and ethnic element on the national scene. This pact has affected the cultural and religious substratum by restricting the national identity to an Arab-Islamic identity, in which the Arabic Language constitutes a civilizational requirement.<sup>285</sup> The first article of the Tunisian Child Protection Code (1995) that advocates raising children in the pride of their Arab and Islamic national identity indirectly reflects a political intention that implicitly refuses this identity and reinforces the feeling of inferiority among Amazigh children.<sup>286</sup> Human rights defenders in Tunisia consider that the State uses harsh austerity measures against the minority that does not respect the universal principles of human rights and prohibits carrying-out of ancestral practices and traditions. By applying this repressive policy, Tunisia is systematically violating major conventions: *the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1963) and *the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and two major pacts: *the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966).

The situation started to change after the revolution and a new democratic phase based on religious and ethnic plurality saw the light of day. Proof of this is that the “*Tunisian Association of Amazigh Culture*” took shape six months after the revolution, which severely criticized the discriminating conditions of Amazigh and denounced the denial policy of their identity. One year after the first association, a second association called “*Amazigh Association for Culture and Heritage*” took shape in Gellala (Djerba) to defend these minority groups, which reflect an unprecedented renaissance of a forgotten identity. These militant associations gave immeasurable assistance to Libyan Amazigh who sought refuge in Tunisia during the Libyan war in an attempt to forge harmonious relationships with similar groups from other countries. It is important to stress that this identity awareness and mobilization remains fragmented in terms of scope of work because these associations operate differently. The first one foresees a

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<sup>285</sup> Iken, W. A. (2011). *L'amazighien standard tunisien*, ed lulu, p. 4-21.

<sup>286</sup> Conseil des Droits de l'Homme des Nations Unies (November 2011), p 3.

national outlook based on local engagement and the second evolves in the framework of the international militancy. This identity awakening, religious quest, and cultural liberation was widely reported in newspapers with Islamic political tendency as “*El Fajer*”, which doubted this Amazigh identity rebirth and qualified it as foreign-led secular movement aimed at disrupting the social cohesion and bearing a form of identity different from the State’s religious identity. Notwithstanding their ideological, political, and operational differences going from conservatism to moderate liberalism, the successive governments in power dragged their feet on the Amazigh issue and did not bear responsibility for solving this situation of inequality.

On the contrary, with the promulgation of the new Constitution (2014), they showed an unyielding attachment to the Arab-Islamic identity and completely ignored the Amazigh’s existence, dignity, and rights. Unlike Morocco, which formalized the Tamazight in the Constitution as a recognized language, the Amazigh culture has been reduced in Tunisia to a patrimonial notion and undesirable identity in danger of disappearing. This reflects Tunisia’s unitary policy that seems democratic but in reality refuses plurality and diversity and promotes a single culture and religion. Notwithstanding reforms and modernization processes in Tunisia, religion remains a red line that should not be crossed, mainly since Islam still represents the first determinant factor in the process of identity building. This aspect has been taken into account in Bourguiba’s policy that did not fully break with the tenet of Islam but tried to make Islam more flexible with modern scientific and economic concepts. His outlook was the turning point of the political and institutional relationship between the State and religious authorities (“*Sheikhs of Zitouna*” called “*Ulemas*”). He put the “*Ulemas*” aside, revised the judicial field, and issued the Personal Status Code, which discarded all archaic interpretations of sharia. What were the cardinal points that characterized the Tunisian policy toward religion?

### **3. Religion and Politics in Tunisia**

Despite their symbolic importance, it became evident that religious traits and experiences have diminished in the Tunisian social landscape, which is progressively emptied of confessional traces previously considered as an indisputable identity acquisition. This detachment fuelled by religious ignorance, the advent of the internet, and openness to the Western media have led to the relocation of the religious element that was previously linked to the territory and religious values. In fact, the major cause of this shift was the restriction of freedom of worship with the authoritarian regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali who adopted a single party system and forced secularization. The secularization of the institutions and non-acceptance of political relativism have interrupted the active circulation of religious messages, disrupted religious homogeneity

and voluntary attendance, and thus created a discrepancy between religious affiliation and national belonging. Although Bourguiba's smart policy going from modern conservatism to liberalism was a first in the Arab countries, his strict monitoring of religious activities and iron fist on religious institution has wiped out the religious vibrancy and narrowed down the religious power by means of a secular bastion that often opposed human rights.

The disorientation and disorganization of religious feeling and practice in Tunisia reflect crises of faith, morals, and ethics and a serious problem of conscience divided between obedience and disobedience to Islamic tradition and value, often hampered by modernity. Indeed, the government's modernist project aimed at including incremental change to improve the social and cultural structure, which challenged the conventional thinking and opposed the Islamic values. The political conviction wanted to melt religion with culture to avoid religious fundamentalism that would threaten Tunisia's stability as is the case in neighbouring countries Algeria and Libya. Nonetheless, this hasty proceeding has a detrimental effect on society, since it provoked a religious relocation and cultural confusion and made from Tunisian society a bewildered society pulled in many directions. Moreover, It turned out that the policy method employed (religious repression, police oversight, prison sentences) was a poor political choice because once Tunisia's security flawed after the regime fell, several processes leading to radicalization and terrorism began and extremist thinking developed. Another sign of this ruthless repression was the surprising rise of Islamists as an active political force six months after the revolution, which changed the playing field after their overwhelming victory in the legislative elections.<sup>287</sup> The government's illegal policy of repression formed a huge wave of solidarity with the religious prisoners who once released benefited from citizens' compassion in their election campaign. Using a discourse of moral and religious values, they presented themselves as an ideal alternative to rebuild a moderated religious institutional base capable of providing a fruitful ground for democracy without dismissing religion.

Ernst Bloch's expression "*principle of hope in religions*" applies perfectly to the Tunisian case after the revolution in the presentation of fresh utopian religious impulses as a miraculous saviour of the country. For Bloch, the disappointment of several unfulfilled promises and the challenge of building a better future are primary sources for revolutionary action.<sup>288</sup> That is exactly what has happened in Tunisia, since after many disappointments from successive governments and sham democracies, a considerable part of the population turned to the faith

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<sup>287</sup> Allal, A., & Geisser, V. (2011). *La Tunisie de l'après-Ben Ali. Les partis politiques à la recherche du «peuple introuvable»*. Cultures & conflits, (83), p. 118-125.

<sup>288</sup> Bloch, E. (1976). *Le Principe Espérance*, Paris, Gallimard, vol I, p15-16.

and voted for the Islamist party with the hope of bettering their situation. In Tunisia, the revolutionary action took a heteronomous religious significance and formed from Islam a backup solution, if not a vital condition of the political success. Consequently, the low-income and poorly educated Tunisians saw in the political views of their religious elite a “*silver bullet*” and voted for them. By coming up with indisputable and uncontroversial ideas deriving from religion and having transcendent legitimacy, the Islamists won the election but were forced to leave power four years later after their failure in running the country. In his book entitled *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis has roundly criticized this transcendent imaginary that rests on indisputable religious principles and thoughtless “*sacralization*”, which impedes human freedom, and, more serious, hinders the process of social change and self-creation.<sup>289</sup> This social heteronomy with religious character feeds on an “*imaginary closing*” based on faith, which isolates individuals from society and blocks their creativity and mental development.<sup>290</sup> Similarly, Burhan stood against this “*extra-social*” perspective and claimed that when religion morphs into an ideological shield placed at the service of politicians, it loses its autonomy, betrays its followers, and hampers the development of democratic societies.<sup>291</sup> In Algeria, Islam has largely marked the political landscape and undermined the value of citizenship because of a rigid ideology that does not fit with national liberation, which in turn caused extremism.<sup>292</sup> This religious hegemony did not take place in Tunisia due to state positions that refused a strong attachment to religious ideals and consequently rejected the political Islam. Bourguiba, known for his canny political mind, was aware that a complete break from Islam guidelines is unthinkable in a conservative society. Thus, through a political stunt, he found a way out of this contentious religious environment. What did Bourguiba do to develop a dual attachment to both Islamic and secular norms?

### 3.1. Bourguiba’s Approach to Religion

Fed by a hegemonic will, Bourguiba has taken a refreshing approach to Islam that intelligently interprets religious references (Koranic verse) so they suit his political agenda and do not antagonize people. This subtle approach to Islam was intended to strengthen the modernist project through a correlation of a traditional society, still in the development phase, and an imperative need for secularization. This modernist stance of religion was based on a deep

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<sup>289</sup> Castoriadis, C. (1975). *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Vol. 336). Paris: Seuil.241-251.

<sup>290</sup> Castoriadis, C. (1999). *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*. 2. Domaines de l'homme. Éd. du Seuil., p. 477-478.

<sup>291</sup> Is a French Syrian sociologist at the university Paris III Sorbonne. Ghalioun, B. (1997). *Islam et politique. La modernité trahie*. Paris, La Découverte, p. 126.

<sup>292</sup> Troudi, M. F. (2009) *Les enjeux de l'islamisme au Maghreb: le cas algérien*, Paris, p. 200-205.

culturalist perspective that gives more value to the belief and dims the religious feeling, which is able to evolve and morph into a potential hazard to the State.<sup>293</sup> Bourguiba wanted a non-denominational state and that was only possible through religious neutrality, personal freedom and liberty, and of course an outright refusal to sectarianism and fanaticism. For this very reason, it was necessary to establish a shared sovereignty with a dominance of public institutions over religious institutions, which should be controlled and structured by the State. Bourguiba introduced himself as Tunisia's spiritual guide and predictor who is able through Islam to build up and reunite the country, but the intention behind it was to dilute the religious authority and weaken its influence and power. To circumvent and thwart the refusal of religious institutions to his secularist trend, Bourguiba hid his modernist intention that initially refused using the term of secularity but gradually defended it.<sup>294</sup> He used highly intelligent and progressive speeches, which contained religious or moral symbolism to underline the importance of professional evolution to obtain the divine reward.<sup>295</sup> After keeping a finger on the pulse of the degree of opposition, his speeches, which initially hid his discontent with Islamic tradition, gradually grew heated and spoke out against asceticism, pious abstinence, and mysticism that impede human productivity. The translation of this discursive shift into an excessively audacious standpoint against religious attachment confirms that at that significant point, Bourguiba understood that the society is ready to drop the traditional concepts of Islam. Therefore, he moved from discourse to action and launched a reform program in two vital fields enclosed in the religious grip (legislative and judicial) and abolished the Islamic courts, polygamy, and marriage for minors. The strident anti-confessional position has paradoxically instrumentalized Islam to boost the construction of a modern state by means of a hidden secularity that gradually broke with the classical religious tradition and proposed a more individual and universal conception of religion. That being said, this shift could work only if the civil primacy overcome the religious element and separate it from political arena. For F. Frégosi, the "*Gallicanism*" of Bourguiba was undoubtedly the ideal solution to get out of this ideological or religious fundamentalism that hampered Tunisia's modernist project.<sup>296</sup> To ensure the proper conduct of his agenda, Bourguiba's policy focused on three key guiding principles: establishing a monopolistic regulation of religious activity, controlling the

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<sup>293</sup> Boudon, R. (1965). *Méthodes de la sociologie*, Paris, EPHE, VI section, p. 50-56.

<sup>294</sup> Hermassi, A. (1994). *Société, Islam et islamisme en Tunisie*. Cahiers de la Méditerranée, 49 (1) , p. 77.

<sup>295</sup> Bourguiba 1972.

<sup>296</sup> Unlike ultramontanism, Gallicanism is a concept that reduces the intervention of the right religious institution to spiritual power far from any political or social function. Frégosi, F. (2003). *La régulation institutionnelle de l'islam en Tunisie: entre audace moderniste et tutelle étatique*. Policy Paper, 4, p.1-33.

administrative and financial power “*Ulamā*”, and blocking the political Islam by excluding Islamic party background from political arena.

To fill this religious void, he presented himself as a viable alternative to occupy the religious sphere and used a shrewd political style combining modernism and conservatism. Largely for this reason, he avowed a religious legitimacy in his speeches referring to the model of the prophet who occupied both religious and political functions and claimed that replicating this successful experience would benefit the nation. Using this flawless example, Bourguiba gave legitimacy to his religious reforms and reduced the *Ulamā*'s hegemony and influence in terms of religious production. The crucial factor and trump card that made this policy work was subjecting the religious authority to state control by making an ancillary flow of religious rhetoric part of the national public arena.<sup>297</sup> Bourguiba's intention has never been to fully separate religion from politics or to entirely secularize the country because it was unfeasible in that challenging time. His primary purpose was to substantially weaken the impact of religious institutions on national politics. To appease the citizens and make sure there is a consistency in his political plan, he always stressed his pious dutifulness and humble devotion to Islam. In his speech in 1962 during the religious fest "*Mouled*", he claimed that "*Islam was the first basis on which the Tunisian State has been grounded after its independence [...] the very basis on which the national struggle has been constituted*".<sup>298</sup>

This reformist and revolutionary approach to religion in terms of policy making mirrors Bourguiba's boldness and philosophical forecasts to wield a moderate Islam and abandon all reactionary ideas, practices, and negative customs. Via a highly innovative analysis to the Koran, Bourguiba managed to transform Islam from an impeding deep-rooted belief and primary point of reference into a moral force and a vector of economic development. This approach closely resembles the thought of the economist and sociologist Max Weber who saw in the Protestant ethic one of the main vectors of the development of capitalism. For Weber, the Protestant ethic emphasizes the importance of labour as a moral duty and provides believers with incentives to work without considering the type of labour.<sup>299</sup> Weber considered that the rationalization of the world as well as the importance attached to productivity are plausible explanations to the secularization of European societies, which have wagered on moral force to

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<sup>297</sup> Kora, A. (2014). *Confronter le passé de la dictature en Tunisie: La loi de « Justice traditionnelle » en question*, IRIS, Observatoire des mutations dans le Monde Arabe, p. 4.

<sup>298</sup> Camau, M., & Geisser, V. (2004). *Habib Bourguiba. La trace et l'héritage*. Karthala Editions., Paris, Karthala, p. 80.

<sup>299</sup> Weber, M. (1991). *L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, Pocket, Agora, p. 119-122.

improve their economics as opposed to the Middle East which remained stagnant in a reactionary perspective. The same for Bourguiba, who connected Muslims' decadence and stunted growth with their confinement in closed traditions, erroneous practice and understanding of religious duty, far-fetched restriction, and blind imitation of the Sufis that he described by "*charlatans*".<sup>300</sup> Just as Weber, Bourguiba was convinced that removing the dominant trait from religion is the key to economic and social success. Being convinced that Tunisia was able to join the procession of modern societies, Bourguiba promoted and improved the understanding of religion in order to economically thrive, just as the Netherlands and England prospered by means of Protestant ethics. In other words, the "*gateway*" to modernity requires progressive dissolving linkages between religious systems and social governance. It should be noted that this lure to western societies did not mean to deploy a slavish imitation to their political principle, but rather to get Tunisia out of religious submission and create better strategy to promote economic activity.<sup>301</sup> This economic perspective was not compliant with many religious practices, even the fundamental concept of Islam. Still, Bourguiba had the audacity to query them.

- He stood up consistently against the dim view of Islam fed by asceticism, mysticism, and reductive readings of Koran that make it lose its universal character and therefore disrupt Tunisia's economic and social development.
- For economic reasons, he encouraged a voluntary breaking of fasting Ramadan by appearing in public during Ramadan (March 1964) drinking a glass of juice and deliberately breaking the fast.<sup>302</sup>
- He severely criticized the blindly following of a "*pilgrimage*" that costs the State a lot of money and encouraged pilgrims to contribute to social and industrial revival instead of constantly leaving for Mecca.
- To boost Tunisia's economy, he gave a "*fatwa*", assuming that donation to support the country is a holy act.
- He intelligently used the religious term "*Jihad*" by emptying it of its spiritual meaning and using it an economic aspect as part of a supreme struggle "*Jihad al-akbar*" against underdevelopment and obscurantism.

An added benefit of his agenda was that a good reasoning requires to renew the religious thinking, rejuvenate approaches to get out from decadence, and engage in a modernization

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<sup>300</sup> Bourguiba (1975).

<sup>301</sup> Lamchichi, A. (2000). *Laïcité autoritaire en Tunisie et en Turquie*. Confluences Méditerranée, (33), p. 35-36.

<sup>302</sup> Belkhouja, T. (1989). *Les trois décennies de Bourguiba, témoignage*, Paris, p. 20-189.

process that uses religion as a vector of progress, creation, and innovation. He expressly acknowledged that his understanding to Islamic law is the most valid interpretation since it supports national interest and facilitates progress without cutting off from religion.<sup>303</sup> To achieve his ends, Bourguiba did not rely on his political charisma earned after his prime contribution in the independence, but he also succeeded in building a religious charisma using a duplicity of religious notions and a circumvention of meaning. Weber has often emphasized that religious, “*magical*”, charisma set against political charisma when political and religious values merge leads to collusion or what he calls cultural crisis (Kulturkampf).<sup>304</sup> How Bourguiba could successfully overcome this opposition? The genius of Bourguiba consisted in his mental flexibility, openness, and mainly “*despotic*” policy that wielded religion to strengthen a political agenda hidden under a religious legitimacy. Just as Weber, he gave a streamlined outlook to religious and cultural reality and stressed the importance of the core functions of each element to ensure social cohesion. More importantly, he found a balanced blend of a “*non-religious*” religion stripped of its real meaning and an authoritarian secularity that puts the priority on political need before religious requirement because the absence of the State would automatically put religion at risk.<sup>305</sup> Using a synchronic approach linking culture and religion, he gradually pervaded the national scene and became the main, if not the only, source of symbolic, moral, and ethical values. He even ranked himself as an expert in Islamic jurisprudence “*faqih*”, provided a balanced synthesis and interpretation combining legal order and Islamic laws, and managed to issue the first personal status code in the Arab world.<sup>306</sup> Pretending to be religious and remarkably attached to the Islamic value, Bourguiba kept reminding of his religious function and his political mission and clearly stated these points in his speech of June 1966 “*By my duties and responsibilities as head of state, I am qualified to interpret religious law [...] As a spiritual leader*”.<sup>307</sup> This innovative stance toward Islam draws heavily on a new interpretation of religious concept “*Iğtihād*” to be able to transcend rigid thinking, confinement, and inflexibility. On March 18, 1974, he used verse nine of Surat Al-Zumar to consolidate the acquisition of science as a religious requirement and a source of development. He stated, “*Did not God say, Can those who have knowledge be placed on the*

<sup>303</sup> Bourguiba, H. (1978). *Discours*, Tunis, Publications du Secrétaire de l'État à l'Information, Institut du monde arabe, p 25-80.

<sup>304</sup> Weber, M. (1972) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*, 5e éd. révisée, Tübingen, Mohr, p 699.

<sup>305</sup> Cherif, M. H. (1994). *Réformes et Islam chez Bourguiba*, Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord, p. 65-66.

<sup>306</sup> Chaumont, É. (2004). *Quelques réflexions sur l'actualité de la question de l'ijtihad*. Franck Frégosi (Org.), p. 72.

<sup>307</sup> *Discours de Habib Bourguiba du 26 juin 1966* (1973), in Ridha Abdallah, Bourguiba et l'Islam, D.E.S de sciences politiques, Paris 1, p 55, translated by me.

same footing with those who are deprived of it?”<sup>308</sup> Similarly, he used the seventh and eighth verse of Surah al-Zalzala to urge Tunisians to become self-reliant and break from religious isolation because God asked them to be the only one responsible for their destiny and deeds.

My thesis is that Bourguiba unknowingly adopted Weber's philosophy and knew that it is not manageable to fully separate politics from religion because it will be difficult for politics to operate without a minimum of religious. By disenchanting the world, Weber confirms that the human is capable of mastering everything through foresight and technique and that magical means and supernatural powers have become a dated concept, overtaken by time.<sup>309</sup> This intellectualization and rationalization was the basic philosophy of Bourguiba who linked the backwardness, ignorance, social and spiritual regression, blocked democratic transitions, and lack of plurality in Arabic countries with their refusal to intelligently interpret Islam. There is always a need to expand beyond tradition and emerge from the mire of enclosed imaginary to progress and prosper. Bourguiba was aware that ensuring a political stability, social solidarity, and economic turnaround is not feasible without religious legitimacy and charisma. Largely for this reason, he brought in a tailored policy of appeasement and conciliation that does not completely discard religion from political decision, on the contrary, it uses Islam “to make the State sacred” and “to make religion public”.<sup>310</sup> This measured and thoughtful approach fit to the Tunisian collective mentality because it took advantage of religion as a functional component of politics to strengthen progress instead of hindering it and thus became an “implicit religion”.<sup>311</sup> This functional interweaving between religion and politics has been used by Bourguiba to reinforce his governance and promote Tunisia’s well-being through a stance that took aspects of both “Hierocracy” and “Caesaropapism”.<sup>312</sup>

Weber considers that this nesting between religion and politics attempts to gain legitimacy and therefore ensure “mass domestication”.<sup>313</sup> This close functional affinity and often manipulation of politics for religion does not obviate their conceptual difference but produces through this rapprochement a competition that weighs in favour of the political component. In this respect, Weber claimed that although there are obvious differences between these two concepts, it is

<sup>308</sup> Habib Bourguiba, *discours du 18 mars 1974*, self translation from french to English

<sup>309</sup> Weber, M. (1986). *Le savant et le politique*, préface de Raymond Aron, p. 69-70.

<sup>310</sup> Camau, M. (1987) *Tunisie au présent, une modernité au-dessus de tout soupçon ?* Paris, CNRS, p. 374-375.

<sup>311</sup> Thomas, G. (2001). *Implizite Religion: theoriegeschichtliche und theoretische Untersuchungen zum Problem ihrer Identifikation*. Ergon-Verlag, p. 10-497.

<sup>312</sup> *Hierocracy* implies a political dominance of priest and *Caesaropapism* implies a political dominance of a secular ruler. Bendix, R., & Roth, G. (1971). *Scholarship and partisanship: essays on Max Weber*. Univ of California Press. P. 124.

<sup>313</sup> Weber 1972, p 536.

possible to find a workable accommodation for the conflictual relationship between religious values and the autonomous laws of politics.<sup>314</sup> Similarly, by rethinking Islam, Bourguiba reached a compromise aimed at renewing the religious implication in the state policy, developing human capital, and encouraging modernization and innovation. This political stunt allowed him to erase the religious opposition and dominate both political and religious arenas. However, his modernist project swinging between a loyalty to Islamic tradition and a renewal in terms of social and political structure evolved over time to produce accentuated secular reforms that have faded the religious input and caused the tearing-apart of Tunisian society between conservative and modernist trends. Most significantly, this double-game policy had serious consequences on society since it has created value, identity, and ideological confusion among individuals. Another unanticipated effect was that this paradoxical policy choice provoked social marginalization and political and religious exclusion of minority religions.

What is most objectionable in Bourguiba's policy is that it was grounded on an exclusive logic and repressive law instead of implementing good measures of persuasiveness that respect humans' right (right to religion). This is borne out by the fact that his project has faced an excessive degree of inflexibility with the population that could not easily harmonize with this innovative thinking and tireless commitment to the State instead of religion. It is true that Bourguiba managed through a nationalist trend and an institutional Islam carrying modernity to unite the nation in the quest for progress and to wipe out the extremist ideas mindset, but his action plan was fragile and unstable. Proof of this was the full effervescence religious movement in the eighties following the economic crisis and the weakening of the State apparatus. This conservative section claimed that Religion is irreconcilable with politics and deemed Bourguiba as the worst enemy of Islam because he managed to wipe out the core set of Islamic values and weakened the religious implication in social organization. The downsizing of the state's regulatory apparatus after the revolution triggered a religious, cultural, and social dislocations and increased violence. The issue that arises is: what are the warning signs of these dislocations?

### **3.2. Dislocation Between Islamic Conservatism and Secular Modernity**

Apart from having boosted the conservative current, the Tunisian revolutionary action has also empowered the modernist bloc, which considers religion as an individual feature and a personal philosophy aligned with individuals' perception and thinking and not a character decreed by the State. This modernist vision rests on a pure capitalist and economic perspective that has

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<sup>314</sup> Weber, M. (1920). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Vol. 1)*. Tübingen, Verlag con JCB Mohr, p 536.

over time superseded the religious ideal and replaced it with a “Productivist ideal”, which, according to Castoriadis, represents a generating factor for identity and political concerns by considering all human activities as economic products.<sup>315</sup> This political disagreement compounded in 2011 when the Islamic party "Ennahdha" rode to power, which brought about the overturning of social stability due to its conservative project. This shift created an ideological rigidity in the public debate because the social reality was extremely unfavourable for an Islamic hegemony due to its ontological incompatibility with democratic principles and human rights. The modernist movement claimed a complete separation between the religious and political sphere, public management and supervision of places of worship (used for recruitment of extremists), and removal of compulsory courses of religious education and switching to optional courses depending on religion. The situation escalated between conservative and secular blocs, and their confrontation revolved around the drafting of the new Constitution and the probability of including Islamic laws from sharia. These conservatives' intentions caused a lot of tension and social frustration and faced a huge opposition, which forced the conservatives to realign on the principles of secularity after realizing that Islamic laws are no longer able to ensure social justice. The main issue of disagreement was article 1 of the Constitution, which for the liberals does not respect societal, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity since it states, “Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is republican”.<sup>316</sup> As the text of article 1 itself shows, through sheer weight of numbers in the Constituent Assembly, the conservatives were able to preserve the religious reference that gives priority to Islam and Arabic. The unwavering struggle of the modernist bloc for secularity bore fruit with the establishing of a democratic and inclusive article (6) that corresponds to their expectation. Article 6 states that “The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalisation. The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir and the incitement of violence and hatred”.<sup>317</sup> Nevertheless, is there not some contradiction between article 1 and article 6?

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<sup>315</sup> Castoriadis, C. (2008) *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe*, tome 5 : Fait et à faire, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, collection « Points-Essais » p. 160-169

<sup>316</sup> Tunisia's Constitution of 2014, translated by UNDP and reviewed by International IDEA, p 4 [www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia\\_2014.pdf](http://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf) retrieved 05.03.2019

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

The ideological and strategic standoff between the two blocs ended with a compromise that enhance both civil and constitutional character of state but at the same time articulates the importance of religion in the national policy. However, the conceptual muddiness and legal loopholes, which surround the religious matter in its relationship with civil status, continue to pose serious challenges in the political arena and mirrors that the Constitution was the result of a political arrangement made to satisfy electors. This religious relocation and vagueness of concept going from attachment to neutrality with regard to religion posed many social and identity challenges. On the one hand, it has allowed atheists, deists, agnostics, and pantheists to demonstrate their non-belief and claim their rights of social and religious freedom by amending discriminatory laws that go with Islamic tradition such as closing of cafes and restaurants during Ramadan. On the other hand, it allows the conservatives to fight against the republican despotism to Islamize the society and impose a social return of a Salafist religiosity. In his book entitled *L'échec de l'Islam politique*, Olivier Roy put great emphasis on the grievous error of this anti-progressive thought that desperately tries to "Islamize modernity" instead of "modernizing Islam".<sup>318</sup> This conservative plan remains highly alarming for the social progress of Tunisia since it seeks to re-Islamize the society from the base by reinserting Islamic concepts into the public domain contrary to the Bourguiba's plan that operated from above.<sup>319</sup>

In social terms, Tunisians are dispassionate about their faith and conceive differently their religious commitment. Meanwhile, the State seeks desperately to find compromises or temporary partial solutions to calm the prevailing identity tension. That being said, Tunisia went through a socio religious metamorphosis in an opposite two-way process (withdraw and openness) which over time caused an identity crisis and a religious upheaval of a cultural nature. A fine example of this identity crisis is the wave of conversions of Tunisian Muslims to Christianity who found their spiritual quest in church and biblical readings. The frustrating part is that the new converts are practicing their cults discreetly for fear of losing their jobs but also for fear of their near environment such as their family and friends who refuse the passage from one religion to another.<sup>320</sup> According to Marc Leonard, pastor of the reformed church of Tunis, Muslims' passage to Christianity is rarely accepted and meets severe rejection and denial because of the unbending stance adopted by the society which implies that meeting with the priests should not be done conspicuously in churches but rather in neutral places.<sup>321</sup> This also

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<sup>318</sup> Roy, O., & Mongin, O. (1995). *Généalogie de l'islamisme*. Paris: Hachette, p. 55-56.

<sup>319</sup> Fregosi, F. (1998). *Le pouvoir sous le régime de Bourguiba*, Paris, p. 120-125.

<sup>320</sup> Interview of Manel Lakhel with Père Marc Léonard, père Blanc Ordonné prêtre en 1995, Bibliothèque diocésaine de Tunis (04.2014) *Minorités religieuses en Tunisie*, retrieved 18.04.2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k33BuRXez08>

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

applies to the converts to Baha'ism who continue to grow in number despite the religious repression and social disintegration sustained from the Muslim majority that consider Baha'ism as a sect created to destroy Islam's unity.<sup>322</sup> The followers of Baha'ism were the subject of strict prohibition that disallowed the practice of their worship and were even punished in case of incitement to adopt their faith.

This disgraceful situation clearly proves that even if the religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, the collective behaviour is against such personal choices, often deemed as apostasy. This mindset cannot improve through laws but rather through education and raising awareness at a very young age about the cornerstones of diversity (tolerance and spirit of openness). Moreover, a solution must be found quickly to deal with the “*religious marketing*”<sup>323</sup> that rose after the revolution, which is a serious issue undermining the social harmony. This religious marketing hides an implementation plan that slowly tries to Islamize the population by introducing the Sharia as an effective alternative to govern. This media manipulation appears as an unprompted sensitization to entice people to Islam but hides behind a retrograde thinking used for the implementation of long-term ideological and political agenda. This is borne out by the fact that after being banned for a long time religious television expanded rapidly after 2012 by the creation of two channels “*Zitouna TV*” and “*ZitounaHidaya TV*”. Given their Islamic tendency, these channels have done everything possible to support the Islamic party during the elections.<sup>324</sup> This commercialization compromises Islam, peels its spirituality, and makes its message lose its religious substance by placing it in the political environment. Moreover, it has implicitly promoted religious hatred and hostility toward other religious communities by condemning religious proselytizing and conversion.

In parallel with this, in the absence of regulation of the Internet, this empowering network morphed into a religious platform that transmits a discourse of discrimination and conductive violence against non-religious groups. By analysing Ben Ali's politics toward religious activity; it is obvious that the Internet was his worst fear because once misused, it could threaten the religious harmony and political stability of the country.<sup>325</sup> He established one of the strictest

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<sup>322</sup> According to the estimates of the Association of Religion Data Archives, the number of *Bahá'í* in 2010 amounted to 2000. *Most Bahá'í Countries* (2010) The Association of Religion Data Archives, retrieved on 18.04.2018 from [http://www.thearda.com/QL2010/QuickList\\_40.asp](http://www.thearda.com/QL2010/QuickList_40.asp)

<sup>323</sup> Is a process used to spread religion, entice and attract new followers in order to gain their loyalty Florescu, C. (Ed.). (2003). *Marketing: dicționar explicativ*. Ed. Economică, p 404.

<sup>324</sup> During the elections, the Zitouna TV channel violated the decree on the communicational freedom of the electoral code, which issued an awareness spot on 6 October 2014 accompanied by the logo of the Islamic party.

<sup>325</sup> Kirchner stressed that under Ben Ali, the state established a stern control at all social levels without exception. Kirchner, H. (2004) *Lokale Zensur und globale Öffentlichkeit. Legitimation im Zeitalter globaler Kommunikation: Das Fallbeispiel Tunesien* », In Angelika Hartmann, *Geschichte und Erinnerung im Islam*, BSB Munich, Göttingen, p. 273

ensorship processes in the world that condemned visits to Islamist sites for suspicion of extremism. As it turns out, Ben Ali was right because after the revolution, the Internet became a triggering factor for Islamic extremism and was transformed into space for radical recruitment. Indeed, seeking for answers to existential and religious questioning, Tunisian youth have turned to the Internet and forums as an easy resource for religious knowledge, which has proved to be erroneous. With the Internet, religion has turned into a communication organizer and a grouping agent used to introduce the notion of the "*Caliphate*" to the believers in which Islam is the only reference of legislation. This gradual shift in religious violence relied on a polarized discourse dividing people according to their beliefs into "*us*" and "*them*". This discourse sought legitimacy in weak texts taken from Islamic heritage and presented as founding texts through a sacralization measure to convince people of its authenticity. It should be noted, however, that progressively the State took things in hand again to curb this religious radicalization by improving its oversight system in terms of media and Internet. Civil society did also have input in this awareness-raising measure and launched initiatives such as "*cyber moms*" and "*cyber challenge*" to limit this harmful use of social networks and promote the value of progressing together.

Notwithstanding the resurgence of religion, there is a rising estrangement from Islamic mores and tradition becoming increasingly evident in Tunisian society. This stepping aside reflects a mental and spiritual detachment from the grip of arduous religious requirement and submission. This relativistic scepticism that pursues spirituality far from religious institutions made from religion an ineffective feature and discarded its symbolic meaning, expression, and historical lines. The denial of transcendence reflects the advent of a new eclectic culture mingling various elements and its widening in the Tunisian society. The expansion of concubinage, which was previously prohibited, assimilated to adultery, and turned into a social reality in most cities, confirms this shift to secularity.<sup>326</sup> This freeing aspect affected also the Tunisian legislation, since after the abolition of the ban on women marrying non-Muslims on September 14, 2017, the law breaks free from the strong religious influence.<sup>327</sup> Moreover, the struggle against the criminalization of homosexuality has taken on great significance over the past decade, mainly with the emergence of association as "*Shems*", which struggle against discrimination based on sexual orientation. This initiative received the great medal of Paris and was able to launch an LGBT webradio in 2017, something that was unthinkable ten years ago. These challenging

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<sup>326</sup>Concubinage is cohabitation of persons not legally married, which is forbidden in Islam. Quran allows sexual intercourse with concubines only after wedlock. Quran verses 4 (3, 25) and 24 (32, 33).

<sup>327</sup> Previously non-Muslim men had to convert to Islam to be able to marry Muslim women. With the abolition of the 1973 law, women are free to marry men of different faiths.

forms of religious deterritorialization weighs in favour of freedom, human individuality and diversity, and provides a useful tool of leadership to reduce the danger of religious syncretism. It should be pointed out that revolutionary action has changed the equation mainly because the religious symmetry is gradually turning into a cultural symmetry through a social inventiveness strange to the religious. Progressively, the mystical value of religion drowns in the cultural perception of reasoning, leaving its place for another form of sacredness nourished by the human's self-production capacity of sacredness. This cultural trend adopted by the modernist usurps Islam from its sacredness, prevalence and exclusivity, and transforms it into a spiritual expression equal to art and music or an aesthetic experience equal to painting and sculpture. Given its significant impact on identity building, understanding and dealing with religion in Tunisia requires reconciliation between religion as a personal conviction and freedom of conscience and religion as social necessities. It is true that Tunisian identity rests on various Islamic cultural values, but following a structural movement of emancipation, it has acquired considerable secular components. The assertion as well as the confrontation between the religious identities in Tunisia built on a broader cultural base reflects new forms of social mutation. Are these identity markers necessarily adversarial and cannot be addressed in a museum of religion? What are the issues revolving around the impact of religion in identity building?

#### **4. The Impact of Religion on Identity Building**

It is obviously difficult to define the concept of identity because of its multidisciplinary dimension, which depends on scholars' ideological angle, perspective of analysis, and theoretical basis. James Clifford considers that it is inappropriate to give identity a definitive aspect related to a specific culture given its complex composition that changes depending on circumstances and interaction with the surrounding environment.<sup>328</sup> The proliferation of religious and cultural references contravenes a restrictive reading or a one-dimensional interpretation of collective and individual identity. For this very reason, I will explore the concept of identity according to a constructive approach (non-essentialist) and reflect its dynamic and relational mechanics while demonstrating its constantly changing and contingent dimension. Whether cultural, social, or religious, identity has aroused a deep interest given its polysemic, ambiguous, multireferential and multidimensional aspects. In the 1950s, Erik Erikson introduced this open-ended concept in the human and social sciences, which quickly

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<sup>328</sup> Clifford, J., (1996). *Malaise dans la culture: l'ethnographie, la littérature et l'art au XXe siècle*. École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, p. 10-39.

became a research focus at the crossroads of many disciplines.<sup>329</sup> Conceptually, this notion has a subjective dimension (personal), which is appropriated or claimed, as well as an objective dimension (social), often assigned or inherited.<sup>330</sup> Given its dynamic interaction, the latter dimension will be the focus of my analysis because of its significance in shaping the identity variation. For Nicole Gallant, this dynamic interaction represents the beating heart of the phenomenon since it provides active links through its relational dimension and personal consciousness with the historical, religious, and social context.<sup>331</sup> This interaction is a progressive process that manifests itself in the sense of belonging and attachment clearly visible in collective social action.<sup>332</sup> Likewise, identity building is a process of distinction and identification that unfolds throughout the entire lifecycle since it goes through successive socializations.<sup>333</sup> More specifically, identity building, rebuilding, and dismantling are permanent changing processes that exert a direct or indirect influence on social relationships and individual and collective experiences. This concept involves various symbolic sub-components, in which the cultural component constitutes the emblematic element that dominates all other constitutive components. In this cultural component, religion forms the strongest stabilizing, dynamic and organizing player that under a logic of regulating directs most of the social relations. The question that arises is whether religion forms the primary catalyst in the process of identity building.

Given its authenticity, this religious subcomponent has paramount importance in the process of identity building, since it operates under a set of norms and values, an “*inherited legacy*”, to ensure potency and subsistence.<sup>334</sup> As a system of meaning, this subcomponent forms a substantial identity referent in the identification process, since it helps individuals to identify and shape their basic orientations (existence/guidance) and make sense of their experiences.<sup>335</sup> This religious identification combines four representational dimensions: community (social and symbolic marks), ethical (values of tradition), cultural (cognitive elements of culture), and

<sup>329</sup> Halpern, C. (2009). *L'identité. Histoire d'un succès*. In Halpern, C.(coord.). *Identité (s). L'individu, le groupe, la société*, p. 7-14.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid

<sup>331</sup> N. Gallant (2013) *Regards sur le rôle du regard d'autrui dans la construction identitaire des jeunes*. In N. Gallant & A. Pilote (d.ir.), *La construction identitaire des jeunes Québec*: Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 212.

<sup>332</sup> Calhoun, C. (1993). *New Social Movements" of the early nineteenth century*. *Social science history*, 17 (3), p 400-413.

<sup>333</sup> Dubar, C. (2010). *La socialisation: construction des identités sociales et professionnelles*. Paris, France: Armand Colin, p. 10-13.

<sup>334</sup> Dubar emphasizes the importance of inherited identity (heritage) that manifests itself in the form of collective identifications. Dubar, C. (2010). *La crise des identités: l'interprétation d'une mutation*. Presses universitaires de France, p. 5-6.

<sup>335</sup> Lefebvre, S. (2008). *Cultures et spiritualités des jeunes*. Les Editions Fides, p. 227-228.

emotional (collective emotional experience).<sup>336</sup> Nonetheless, considering it as the leading component in charge of inter-group relations, social organization and human interchange is an unreliable approach that needs to be reviewed and revised. Such a perspective sanctifies the religion based on the logic of in/group, out/group and reduces the influence of culture in the social sphere, which is fundamentally wrong. P. Beaucage severely criticizes the “*sacralization*” of the religious dimension and underlines that such identification is an unconscious construction of difference.<sup>337</sup> The identity process should not be reduced to a religious construction because it gathers social, ethnic, ethical, and cultural aspects at the same time. Against this background, there is an important difference between the identity and the “*role*” since one person can be father, Christian, journalist, community speaker, activist, or human rights defender, and all these elements do not constitute his identities, but rather his functions. In other words, identities are sources of meaning more powerful than roles, because they hold meaning, while roles hold functions.<sup>338</sup> Identity allows a person to differentiate himself from others and operate alongside the existing social fabric, whereas the functions are not subjective markers but rather constitute norms dictated by family, social, or religious institutions. How far has religion affected identity building in Tunisia?

#### **4.1. The Religious Identity in Tunisia**

Deriving its legitimacy from spiritual tradition, the religious component represents a key vector in the process of identity building, since by establishing symbolic boundaries of adherence, it immensely contributes to forging individual and collective identity as well as shaping social group. This religious element is deepened and enriched through a transmission of values that puts primary emphasis on religious belonging and ritual commitment in order to ensure a social recognition and compliance with the common collective heritage. The religious logic sets the groups boundaries by dictating norms, guidelines, and knowledge. This process of transmission occurs through a dual mechanism of socialization: a primary socialization (familial setting) and secondary (social setting) and it is conducted in two stages: diachronic (received/inherited identity) and synchronic (intended identity).<sup>339</sup>

In Tunisia, this identity is marked by heredity, “*natural disposition*”,<sup>340</sup> biologically acquired (factual situation) and conditioned subsequently by the family setting for rooting the religious

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<sup>336</sup> Hervieu-Léger 2001, p 12-15.

<sup>337</sup> Beaucage, P. (1995). *Ethnies et sociétés: deux ethnohistoires des Nahuas (Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexique)*. La Construction de l'anthropologie québécoise, Mélanges offerts à Marc-Adélar Tremblay. Ed. F. Trudel, P. Charest e Y. Breton. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 180-181.

<sup>338</sup> Castells, M. (1999). *Le pouvoir de l'identité*, L'Ere de l'information, tome 2 Paris: Fayard, p 17.

<sup>339</sup> Dubar 2010, p 15-20.

<sup>340</sup> Sourdel, D., & Sourdel-Thomine, J. (2002). *Vocabulaire de l'islam*. Paris: PUF, collection Que saisje, p. 29.

precepts in children's minds. For Muslims, God's truth "*Al-haqq*" and the abiding faithfulness to "*Tradition*" are indisputable issues in this process given their tautological aspects.<sup>341</sup> Being Muslim is a religious heredity generated by birth and draws its strength from the theological notion "*Fitra*",<sup>342</sup> whereas the religious affiliation is achieved in a later stage as part of a parental guidance to sustain this natural affiliation. Thus, the religious affiliation is obtained (inherited), accepted (family), and could be at a mature age integrated (society) according to a person's conviction. In Tunisia, the parents are the leading players of the religious reproduction in all religious communities because they dictate a religious habitus to inculcate ritual and practices in their children's life habit. More importantly, the more the environment becomes secular, the more parents' involvement and efforts increase to ensure a better transmission of their religious background.<sup>343</sup> That is exactly the situation in Tunisia, because the parents use their best endeavours to convey their tradition of reference to their children and maintain a distance from other confessions. For this reason, I think that one of the major reasons for Tunisia's religious discord lies in the behaviour that deprives young Muslims, Jews, and Christians to be acquainted with other faiths at a young age (complete separation) and find themselves confronted with them at an older age, which in some cases create tension and conflict. Indeed, this religious discord has to do with the fact that the natural predisposition to a particular faith has over time morphed into a religious allegiance that often takes precedence over cultural and national belonging.

It should be noted, however, that with the paradigm shift to the new information age, these traditional socialization bodies (family/religious institution) have considerably lost their normative capacity and aegis with the emergence of new socialization bodies.<sup>344</sup> This factor has severely affected the relationship with religion and created a critical distance, opting for an autonomous spirituality instead of religiosity.<sup>345</sup> The new social reality has incorporated a cultural diversity both in religious belonging and in representations, which, for example, gave Islam a complex and diversified dimension and even a plural form "*Islams*".<sup>346</sup> That is what happened in Tunisia, since many ways of understanding religion emerged and affected the

<sup>341</sup> Tradition is the religious texts apart from Quran, which is Sunna inspired from the hadith. Chebel, M. (2001). *Dictionnaire des symboles musulmans*. Albin Michel, p. 194.

<sup>342</sup> This term is mentioned in Quran 30, 30. Translated in dictionary as natural, instinct. Reig, D. (1999). *Larousse dictionnaire Arabe-Français: Français-Arabe*. Larousse.

<sup>343</sup> Warner, R. S., & Williams, R. H. (2010). *The role of families and religious institutions in transmitting faith among Christians, Muslims, and Hindus in the USA*. Religion and youth, p. 160.

<sup>344</sup> Gauthier, F., & Perreault, J. P. (2008). *Jeunes et religion dans la société de consommation: État des lieux et prospective*. Jeunes et religion au Québec, p. 9-20.

<sup>345</sup> In popular acceptance, spirituality is now preferable to religion given its free, inclusive and pluralist dimension. Lefebvre 2008, p 278.

<sup>346</sup> Allievi, S. (1999). *Les convertis à l'islam: les nouveaux musulmans d'Europe*. Harmattan, p. 13.

religious thought and practice that went concurrently through a revival and dissolving because of the homogenization of the religious scene. This new stance toward religion in contemporary Tunisia has impaired the conformist religious model and dimmed its inherited norms due to the incompatibility of the essentialist discourse with the peoples' expectations and perspective. This shift added more significance to the individual experience in the process of identity building and gave individuals the choice between identification to the religious group's image or the differentiation/distance from their referential group.

This distancing is, in fact, not a categorical rejection of religion, but rather an optional recognition and a flexible relationship to religion that tends to adopt suitable norms and dismiss the others.<sup>347</sup> This new interpretation changed the religious identification into a personal choice and a selective sorting based on a dynamic personal experimentation whose purpose is acquiring a personal fulfilment. This personal choice is an ongoing process that undergoes relentless change related to many interferences and events capable of conditioning it. For example, the extremist trend as well as the unpleasant experience with terrorism that afflicted Tunisia after the revolution has severely affected the image of Islam and weakened the religious commitment to Islam in the collective conscience. This flawed understanding of Islam (extremist thinking) is one of the most serious identity deformations that marks the Tunisian religious scene and threatens its national security. This social return of Salafism has to do with the enlargement of Koranic schools and Islamic internment camps, which were strictly prohibited before the revolution. The utopian discourse and transmitted models for Tunisian youth in Koranic schools bear the primary responsibility for extremist behaviour because they intensify hatred and promote violence. For those youth requiring spiritual discernment, the collective experience of Islam is able to boost their confidence and consolidate their personal identity through the reinforcement of shared ownership and belonging (community recognition). Hervieu-Léger considers that group experiences represent for young people a key factor to finding their inner harmony and to providing a sense of collective identity through a communal feeling of "We".<sup>348</sup> Thus, adolescents try to find meaning to their life through religious confinement, withdrawal from community, risky behaviour, and sometimes with "symbolic play with death".<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Campiche, R. J. (1997). *Cultures jeunes et religions en Europe*. Les éd. du Cerf, p. 8-9.

<sup>348</sup> Hervieu-Léger 2001, p 146-148.

<sup>349</sup> D. Le Breton (2005) *Approche anthropologique des conduites à risque des jeunes*. In D. Jeffrey & D. Le Breton & J. Josy Lévy (dir.) *Jeunesse à Risque, Rite et Passage* Québec: les Presses de l'Université Laval, p .17-23.

I would like to reiterate clearly that that I am not referring in this context to the 1,664 Koranic schools operating in Tunisia, because they work under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and follow a standard educational curriculum. My main criticism is about the illegal Koranic school belonging to associations funded by countries like Qatar and Emirate that try to transmit an archaic religious education and relaunch retrograde thinking. A prime example of this unlawful formation remains the illegal Koranic school recently discovered in Sidi bouzid, which shelters 30 out-of-school teenagers (aged between 12 and 18) cut off from civilized life and kept away from their families for unduly long periods. These children are refused the right to enter into dialogue with their master and are flogged if they disobey; more seriously, they were exploited in picking olives and working the land instead of learning. In aggregate terms, in the name of religion, these children were treated like slaves to satisfy their religious masters and had been even, in some case, sexually abused. This ideological recruitment of young minors appears to be a religious instruction set to learn the Qur'an, but in fact represents an intensive brain washing and a format to the violence and hatred of the others. Thus, it is becoming urgent for the State to take the matter into its own hands and find a solution for these extremist movements using all ways to radicalize Muslim youth.

The examination of the identity process in Tunisia requires a careful consideration of citizenship and religious affiliation given their impact on conditioning the personal and collective construction. It is apparent that the State placed more emphasis on citizenship and adopted a liberal approach to integrate faith and culture at the heart of the democratic process. In this respect, a study conducted by SIGMA Council showed that Tunisia distinguishes itself with a good balance between citizenship and religious affiliations in comparison to Maghreb countries. The overwhelming majority of the surveyed citizens (sample of 1000 persons) voted for the separation between religion and politics and against violence and religious extremism.<sup>350</sup> Yadh Ben Achour, specialist in Islamic theories and politics, stressed the importance of Tunisian focus on promoting the citizenship to foster the relationship of interdependence between citizens and state, claimed that the equality of right before the law has dismissed the inequality based on faith, and gave birth to plurality and multiculturalism.<sup>351</sup> However, under the influence of religious revelations and apparatus of power, the plurality of identities

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<sup>350</sup> *Présentation des résultats des enquêtes par sondage en Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Libye Egypte* (10 mai 2016). [www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_45134-1522-3-30.pdf?160510132356](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_45134-1522-3-30.pdf?160510132356), retrieved 11.05.2018.

<sup>351</sup> Achour, Y. B. (2000). *Politique et religion en Tunisie*, Confluences Méditerranée, n°33, p. 237.

engenders often tensions and contradictions both in the image that the individual has of himself and in his actions in society.<sup>352</sup>

In the last decades, there is a contagious need to express and impose an own identity growing in societies, which engendered a period of unleashing and proliferation of identity trends.<sup>353</sup>

The sociologist Manuel Castells had an interesting thesis in which he argued that the social construction of identity always occurs in a context marked by power struggles between the religious sphere (*al-dawla islamiyya*) and the civic sphere (*al-dawla quawmiya*).<sup>354</sup> He puts forward a constructivist typology reflecting three tension-filled identity trends (Legitimate Identity, Resistant Identity, and “Project” Identity) that raise in formal Islamic countries marked by modernity.<sup>355</sup> My thesis is as follows: The typology of Castells is relevant to perform in-depth analysis of the identity currents in Tunisia because the unique model and reference of national identity has confronted the dominant group and its values with minority groups, which caused an identity-related tension and brought blatant social breakdown. Moreover, most interestingly, the failure of the “*nation state*” in implementing regulatory modernization and harmonization and developing the economy has contributed to the rise of fundamentalism.

Identity trend	Player	Forms	Purpose
<b>The Legitimate Identity</b>	-Social actors -Organizations - Institutions - Nation state	-Laws -Codes and standards of normativity and civility -Conformity -Homogeneity	- Extending and justifying the domination of the ruling class over the other social classes - Maintaining an equitable integrity to social and cultural normativity
<b>The Resistant Identity</b>	Social actors	-Refusal of social normativity and surrounding norms -Reinforcing their protectionist particularism (religious)	-Strengthening the peculiarity of a group - Protecting their identity by avoiding any contamination of the surrounding society (religious withdrawal)
<b>The “Project” Identity</b>	Social actors	-Respect the chosen/inherited cultural referents - Respect the codes of the surrounding society	-Building a new identity - Redefining its position in society -Establish a post-patriarchal society

Table 1 . *The Typology of Identity Building, M. Castells (1999)*

<sup>352</sup> Castells 1999, p 17.

<sup>353</sup> Hooson, D. J. M. (Ed.) *Geography and national identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, p. 2-3.

<sup>354</sup> Castells, p 28.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, p 18.

It is important to stress that my aim is not to generalize people into categories and define them with distinctive features, because it is often inaccurate and superficial. My intention is to conduct an in-depth analysis of interaction, shift, and dynamic of the identities current in Tunisian society. It is important to stress that this classification is neither a static distinction nor a fixed separation, because individuals often change their perception, conviction, and even degree of religiosity. There are dynamical shifts between these trends, and persons switch from a current trend to another and may even belong to similar trends at the same time.

#### 4.2. The Identity Trends in Tunisia

The identity trends in Tunisia is a complex subject that deserves further consideration given its paradoxical relationship with religion, personal conviction, and progressive change of the society. Through multiculturalism, the national identity is no longer the base reference and existential wholeness of individuals, who henceforth gradually emerge from its stringent conformity and normativity. This cultural diversity has produced several identity reactions (synthesis of belonging), which operate through different processes of ownership, participation, and individual organization that goes beyond the social functions of the collective culture.<sup>356</sup> In spite of this divergence, the normative authority is doing its best to erase the weight of alterity and alienate social actors with its identity referent. Bourdieu considers that this standardization has an adverse effect on society because it unreservedly promotes the supremacy of one identity over another.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, this standardization and compelled attempts of unification against the will of social actors leads in the longer-term to social and religious confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction. Thus, because of this enforced norm, the social actor takes a step back, relativizes the standard norms, and ends up referring to himself (individualism). This process occurred because the reference frame has lost its consistency and gradually gave way to other identity markers. M. Castells stressed the seriousness of the detachment from normativity that strokes modern societies and even spoke of the emergence of phenomenon of “*identity deconstruction*” that raised against a single worldview and exclusive ways of thinking.<sup>358</sup> This divergence is particularly apparent in Tunisia, which went through a religious and social upheaval and caused the plight of young people. This crisis of confidence is evident in the hierarchical relations between a dominating majority (Muslim) and repressed minorities

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<sup>356</sup> Castells 1999, p 18.

<sup>357</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1980). *L'identité et la représentation*. Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, 35 (1), p.71.

<sup>358</sup> Castells 1999, p. 19-21.

(religious and non-religious). This crisis is the result of a power struggle between the “*nation state*” and the heterogeneous identity movements.

Tunisia’s national identity rests on two indelible markers (religion and nationalism) and it is imposed de facto. Nonetheless, over time, social groups who claim different identities no longer accept this imposition of values. Concretely, that means that the assigned identity as a unique and identical process is stepping aside for a relational and dynamic process, which generates more and more identity variation according to individuals’ biographical trajectory.<sup>359</sup> In Tunisia, the international influences and modernization of society have caused a social upheaval and triggered a multicultural diversity that has weakened the state nation and opened the way to identity divide. It is true that this religious divide is not a new phenomenon in Tunisian society, but it was not of this gravity. This discord has grown and compounded with the weakening of the State in the last decade. After the fall of the authoritarian regime in 2011 and the cessation of repression and censorship, the State gradually submitted to multiculturalism and found itself obliged to accept different religious systems and to guarantee minorities’ rights before the law.

As a direct result of this social and religious emancipation, many identity trends sought for more social recognition, better conditions, and refused the label of being considered ostracized segments of conservative society that denies their autonomy and freedoms. This detachment and alienation from traditional beliefs and adoption of an optional approach to religion affected the general population but particularly marked the younger generations.<sup>360</sup> M. Castells has given this identity trend a distinct name “*Project Identity*” since it tries to promote a constructive role for itself by standing out from religious confinement, refusing assimilation, and seeking through measured concessions to create a common ground with religious otherness.<sup>361</sup> Nonetheless, in the face of this secular challenge threatening the Tunisian Muslim identity, the conservative trend “*Resistant Identity*”, stood up against the modernistic approach toward religion and made every attempt to protect the social beings against secularization and incitement to religious conversion deemed as apostasy. These smaller factions are both dominated from the statism “*Legitimate Identity*”, which is closely linked to the Arab-Muslim heritage based on a religious reference and a civilian component embedded in a precise historical path. This begs the question as to how this predominantly national identity operates.

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<sup>359</sup> Halpern, C. (2016). *Identité (s). L'individu, le groupe, la société (NE): L'individu, le groupe, la société*. Sciences Humaines, p. 35.

<sup>360</sup> Campiche 1997, p 48-50.

<sup>361</sup> Castells 1999, p 18-19.

#### 4.2.1. The Legitimate Identity

The legitimate identity is a resistant cultural construct characterized by a defensive stance that draws strength from specific values of self-identification, morality, and social normativity. This movement wrecks other religious allegiances on the ground of their institutional and administrative powerlessness because of either a religious fundamentalist or confinement, or for an exaggerated secularity, that contradicts the social norms.<sup>362</sup> Based on a defensive posture, this trend tends to implement authoritarian structures to ensure a cultural harmony and social stability, which in return leads to a social disadvantage and exclusion of non-compliant groups. This dominating social category adopts a normative model that uses religious difference as a pretext to avert potential threats of resistance as fundamentalism or secularity. This social category acts as an advocate for moral factors and "*imperative rules*"<sup>363</sup> which forms a fundamental element of the collective consciousness and common beliefs and feelings. In Tunisia, this socially and politically powerful majority draws its strength partly from an institutional legitimacy called "*tunisianité*"<sup>364</sup> based on nationalist and personalized religious lines that do not take into consideration minorities' cultural, religious, and ethnic values. In other words, this trend is made up of a relatively religious and nationalist social being marked by a dual attachment to Islamic and secular norms. Speaking of countries such as Tunisia, Castells put great emphasis on tensions occurring in a formally Islamic society fully integrated in capitalism and on the difficulties of establishing a peaceful coexistence because of state rejection of all forms of religious fragmentation and social unpredictability.<sup>365</sup>

In the course of a survey (1000 Tunisians) conducted to assess their sense of belonging, 53% considered themselves Tunisians, 37% chose to identify themselves as Muslim, 6.8% as Arab and 2.2% gave others answers.<sup>366</sup> More importantly, 41.2% of the respondents deemed that the national identity is more meaningful and significant in Tunisia than the religious identity.<sup>367</sup> These figures reveal the effectiveness of the state policy to entrench the values of a legal-rational normativity and strong national sentiments at the affective, cognitive, experiential, and behavioural levels. In fact, by reducing the power of religion in social and political

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> É. Durkheim 1893, p 28.

<sup>364</sup> Tunisianité is a patriotic narrative that refers to Tunisia's history and identity, value the culture of consensus and moderation, and reject radicalism. Meijer, R., & Butenschøn, N. (2017). *The crisis of citizenship in the Arab world*. Brill, p. 141

<sup>365</sup> Castells 1999, p 25.

<sup>366</sup> Présentation des résultats des enquêtes (KAS), 2016.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

organization, this socio-economic stance managed to put to the fore the national belonging, history, and collective memory in common territorial, patrimonial, and cultural dimensions. This stance stifled the value of the Arab-Muslim culture, weakened the religious feeling, and submitted individual religious freedoms to state control. This cultural shift aimed at the consolidation and enhancement of the Tunisian persona could not be accomplished without placing the legitimate identity “*Tunisianity*” before the Islamic identity. Notwithstanding its modernist vision, this trend did not cut the umbilical cord with Islam but rather adopted an optional position between obedience and disobedience to the Islamic tradition on one hand, and espousing progressive thought of modernistic liberal trends on the other. The Tunisian Islamologist Hichem Djaït confirms that even if Islam succeeded in shackling persons’ instincts, in view of the difficulty of following its precepts to the letter, they ended up disobeying it, otherwise it could have been the end of their existence.<sup>368</sup>

The Legitimate Identity drew a distinction between religious commitment as prostration, prayers deemed as religious markers, and socio-cultural practices as social habits rooted in the everyday life of the community. The commitment degree to religious practices in this current is relative and depends on the relationship to Islam. Unlike the Egyptians, known for religious commitment to rituals (fasting, praying, and Zakāt) considered as mandatory worships, these requirements became in Tunisia recommended community activities. Evidence of this comes from the survey results mentioned above that revealed that 55.4% of Tunisian interviewees showed a regular commitment to prayer, contrary to 81% of Egyptian interviewees, who reflected more religious commitment to praying.<sup>369</sup> This gradual religious disengagement and release from religious obligation has transformed substantial ritualistic practice in Islam such as fasting Ramadan or the feast of the Sacrifice “*Eid al-Adha*” into community, festive, and culinary activities, which made them lose their spiritual value and symbolism. For Steven Brint, this loosening behaviour is undeniable proof that the religious commitment that previously shaped individual's worldview has been called into question, which, accordingly, reduces its affinity for the religious community.<sup>370</sup> It is important to point out that this trend suffers from a discontinuity in the transmission of religious references due to a weak religious socialization in family and community settings. Although the propensity to set aside Islam’s strict rules and

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<sup>368</sup> Djaït, H. (1990). *Al-šahsiyya al-‘arabiya al-islāmiyya*, (la personnalité arabe islamique) translated by Mongi Sayadi, Beyrouth, Dar Talya, p. 117.

<sup>369</sup> Présentation des résultats des enquêtes (KAS), 2016.

<sup>370</sup> Brint, S. (2001). *Gemeinschaft revisited: A critique and reconstruction of the community concept*. Sociological theory, 19 (1), p 5-20.

practices has increased in recent decades, it could not completely erase the traditional conservatism but rather gave it an extra intellectual dimension.

In Tunisia, the inherited dimension of religion is not denied, and this is evidenced in the State-prohibition of defaming Islam or violating its fundamental values because this conduct is able to disrupt both the territorial integrity and public order. The State, as first player of the “Legitimate Identity”, draws its organizational policy on few Islamic regulations, since it punishes drunkenness and prohibits the public sale of alcohol near schools and mosques and during religious holidays. This policy, often authoritarian, becomes more intense during religious fest events and especially during Ramadan when authorities often close open cafes and restaurants. In June 2015, several non-touristic cafes across the country have been inspected, closed, and reprimanded for breaking the law and encouraging consumption, and often the clients were badly treated because of their non-observance of Ramadan. More seriously, four Tunisians were sentenced to one month's imprisonment and a fine for indecent exposure that consisted of drinking and eating in public during Ramadan. Although the law does not prohibit this behaviour during Ramadan, the justice considered this act provocative because it violates public morale, hurts believers' sensibilities, and sows discord. The court decision has revived the debate on individual freedoms as it contradicts the freedom of conscience embodied in article 6 of the Constitution.

This evolutionary relationship to religion rests on a convictional fidelity to moral demands but also a resistance to inflexible practices in everyday life. This reflects a personalized relationship to Islam based on a commitment of circumstance and a conditional rupture. In other words, it simultaneously draws on a situational devotion to Islamic norms and a profound influence of modern culture. This new personal appropriation of religion succeeds to revise, redefine, and add new meaning to the religious content, which in modernity lost its mechanical dimension of reproducing identically the inherited notions.<sup>371</sup> A. Bouhdiba summed up the relationship of Tunisians with religion with a famous quote: “*Fulfill your obligations and do what you like*”.<sup>372</sup> As regards this claim, it must be stated that even if religion enormously marks the mind of individuals, the social changes force them to progressively forsake the religious factors and practices given their inadaptability with the present conditions. This transgression and relative remoteness of religion has transformed some religious traditions into forms of superstitions for

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<sup>371</sup> Micheline, M. (1992). *Typologie de l'organisation des systèmes de croyance*. Les croyances des Québécois. Esquisses pour une approche empirique, Québec, Université Laval, p. 130.

<sup>372</sup> Bouhdiba, A. (1973). *A la recherche des normes perdues*. Maison tunisienne de l'édition, p. 95 (self-translation).

a class of persons and generated in contrast a resurgence of a new form of religiosity. Castells claimed that the construction of social being took a different course and it is no longer shaped from civil society but rather from community resistance.<sup>373</sup> In Tunisia, the failure of the State, social, and economic modernization and its suppression for religion caused a revolutionary fundamentalism and led to the collapse of the nationalist project.

#### 4.2.2. The Resistant Identity

The Resistant Identity grows in the subjective part of culture and feeds on religious traditional thought transmitted from one generation to another at different levels of awareness.<sup>374</sup> A. Etzioni sees in this trend the most important movement in societies since it constitutes the prime generator of communities.<sup>375</sup> The resistant current continually tries to shield its religious reference and ends up adopting a social withdrawal to preserve the purity of morals, faith, and spiritual life and avoids the contamination threat of secularity. This conservative logic is based on principles of separation and subtraction that reduces the individuals to protective community actors. For this current, the principle agents of religious socialization are families, religious community, religious scholars, and spiritual leaders who are in charge to ensure the continuity of transmitting the religious reference and the deepening of religious knowledge.<sup>376</sup>

Principally based on religious communitarianism, this identity trend has inflexible postures toward social progress as well as religious, artistic, and scientific freedom. This communitarian shelter feeds on ethno-religious negative solidarity to avert collision with secularity, which led to an extremely hostile and confrontational approach to religious differences. It should be pointed out that the followers pertaining to this trend are systematically in a “*reactionary reaction*” to conserve the community unity and even broaden it.<sup>377</sup> In Tunisia, this conservative stance that refuses acculturation and integration can be seen in two categories: the Islamic conservatism (Salafism) and the withdrawal of the Jews of Djerba. Their enclosure reflects a frustrated identity charged with a conservative sideline aimed at preserving the original culture that lays under threat and stigmatization by a political domination and forced secularization. Castells stress that these currents may dominate the society institution’s morph into a Legitimate Identity and acquire an unconstrained power and dominance in the course of the

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<sup>373</sup> Castells 1999, p. 22.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>375</sup> Etzioni, A. (1993). *The spirit of community*, New York, crown, p. 20.

<sup>376</sup> Gallant 2013, p. 213-219.

<sup>377</sup> Marty, M. E. (1988). *Fundamentalism as a social phenomenon*. Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 42 (2), p. 20.

historical development.<sup>378</sup> In post-revolutionary Tunisia, the conservative current is following the transformation of the neo-community into a “*necro-community*” that uses violence as a means of self-affirmation.

### 4.2.2.1. Islamic Conservatism

The State’s aggressive modernization, close control of the religious matter, as well as the decline of the religious educational quality have caused a religious vacuum in Tunisia’s religious scene and distanced the new generation from Islam. The secularizing culture that infiltrated into the nooks and crannies of the society forced a minority part of the Muslim community to close in on itself to protect against this invasive culture because of its religious incompatibility with the new social norm. This category adopted a defensive stance (Salafism) that refuses to follow State’s political lines and continually tries to establish a political Islamism to emphasize the primacy of moral and religious education. The Salafism represents a heterogeneous composite set of individual or groups’ self-directed initiations in perpetual motion. This thought believes in a causal relationship between applying Islamic principles and gaining considerable success, both socially and economically. There are two forms of Salafism that operate differently: a predicative movement (*salafiyya al-da’wa*), which is socially conservative and politically inactive and seeks to establish a solid religious formation, and a revolutionary movement (*al-salafiyya al-jihâdiyya*) known for its extremist tendencies and the fight to accomplish the kingdom of Islam.<sup>379</sup>

The structuring idea of Tunisian Salafist discourse is that people have moved away from the “*true*” Islam, have drawn away from religious practice, and their task consists of restoring the religious order. Before the revolution, these two branches were stringently repressed by authorities, but now they steadily grow and become socially and politically active. Under Ben Ali, thousands of people were imprisoned, 157 religious groups were suspended from activity, and several mosques were closed due to a suspicion of terrorism.<sup>380</sup> The State’s abusive behaviour was one of the main reasons for this shift to conservatism, because an enormous number of people have been mistreated and imprisoned, which consequently led to a revenge-seeking attitude in victims’ social circle. The alarming fact is that this current tries to implement a complete state submission to Islam and promotes a primary fidelity to an “*Umma*” (Muslim

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<sup>378</sup> Castells 1999 p. 19.

<sup>379</sup> Amghar, S. (2006). *Le salafisme en Europe*. Politique étrangère, (1), p. 67-75.

<sup>380</sup> Muhanna-Matar, A. (2017). *The limit-experience and self-deradicalisation: the example of radical Salafi youth in Tunisia*. Critical Studies on Terrorism, 10 (3), p. 4

community) instead of “*Watan*” (nation). It even drew a distinction between the Muslim world “*Dar al-Islam*” and the non-Muslim world “*Dar al-Harb*”, which should observe Islam and obey God.<sup>381</sup>

The fall of the despots in Tunisia triggered a sudden, excessive, and chaotic liberalization of the religious market for the Salafists who have done everything possible to control all religious places and discourses. As a result, a fifth of the mosques escaped the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and passed under control of Salafist preachers.<sup>382</sup> This vigilantism and informal controls of religious spaces has been a catalyst for this current, which exponentially multiplied to reach 20,000 overt Salafist and more seriously between 7,000 and 9,000 jihadists.<sup>383</sup> The institutional reforms from 2011 onward intensified the religious struggle and cultural confrontation between Salafists and the rest of the population after the weakening of the State’s response ability. This liberalization has unleashed their social, religious, and political involvement in public space and launched an extremist discourse despiser of democracy. Castells stressed that one of the preferred methods of communication of such current lies in challenging both governmental policies and social norms and drawing attention to its religious and social repression (propaganda) to arouse public compassion.<sup>384</sup> This observation applies to Tunisia since as part of controversial moves to score political points and attract media attention, Salafists often entered into a confrontation with the institutional mechanism that, in their opinion, restricts their freedom of religion. The first incident of this religious resistance arose at the Faculty of Manouba in 2011 around the issue of wearing the Niqab during classes and exams. Salafists opposed the university’s measures infringing on their religious freedom and organized sit-ins and carried out violent actions that caused a total halt of classes for two months.<sup>385</sup> The most startling issue is that no ministerial circular banning the Niqab was published, which reflects the state of powerlessness and fear of the Salafists who gained in strength and hardened their attitudes. The most persuasive arguments that this movement is gaining some social ground is that out of the 1000 Tunisians interviewed, 20.9% supported the wearing of “*Qamis*” and 4.0% supported the wearing of the full veil in everyday lives to respect the Islamic requirement.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Castells 1999, p. 27.

<sup>382</sup> Fahmi, G., & Meddeb, H. (2015). *Market for Jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia*, Carnegie Middle East, p. 11.

<sup>383</sup> Allani, A. (2012). *Islamism and Salafism in Tunisia after the Arab Spring*. In Right to Nonviolence Tunisia Constitutional E-Forum, p. 4.

<sup>384</sup> Castells 1999, p. 28-29.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p 5.

<sup>386</sup> Présentation des résultats des enquêtes (KAS), 2016.

The post-revolutionary euphoria made the Tunisian Salafism lose its quietist dimension and gained a banditry aspect, which motivated some Salafists to attack cafes and restaurants open during the day in Ramadan 2012. Most significantly, this Salafist resistance took a police form and exerted a strong controlling role on public space to stop religious infraction. For instance, Adel Almi, the founder of The Association of Preaching and Reform, challenged the State, acted without legal authority, and led a campaign against gastronomic spaces open during Ramadan. He even lodged complaints against Cafes' owners for serious detriment of religious morality based on the circular of July 1981.<sup>387</sup> The intention behind both individual and communitarian dynamism of this Salafism is to supplant young religious apparatus on Tunisian social ground in order to redefine Tunisia's social landscape and stop the forces of modernization and liberalization that swept the country. This movement acts directly on disadvantaged social classes in poorer districts in both rural and urban areas by uttering a preaching of Islamic thought and jurisprudence in mosques and universities through student unions. These speeches contain a clear negative incentive for disobedience and confrontation to get out of the authoritarian secular system and morphed over time into an encouragement to extremism. The Salafists refuse to recognize all political elective institutions, exclude any form of social activism other than Islam, seeks to re-establish a missing religiosity by offering hope for the possibility of re-establishing an Islamic effervescence instead of the prevailing opportunistic democracy.

The breach in the religious symbolic and institutional space has succeeded in seducing and recruiting a large part of young Tunisians who were seeking a new status and identity. The Salafist movement has quickly become a driving force in society, and its position hardened and caused a tension and insecurity with the strengthening of its anti-system posture that encourages, clandestinely, rebellion and jihadism. This shift in jihadist subversion exacerbated the social crisis between Islamists and the secular bloc "Project Identity" and made blood flow with the assassination of two progressive politicians in 2013. This anti-democratic posture became increasingly aggressive and spawned several terrorist attacks aiming at weakening the State. In the second stage, this extremist thinking expanded abroad with the affiliation of 2,800 Tunisians to jihadist groups, and nearly 15,000 tried to leave the country in 2015 to join extremist organizations.<sup>388</sup> This shift to religious violence has been alerting the government

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<sup>387</sup> Tunisia: Adel Almi lance sa traque aux non-jeûneurs (30 Mai 2017), retrieved on 09.05.2018 from: [www.webdo.tn/2017/05/30/tunisie-adel-almi-lance-traque-aux-non-jeuneurs](http://www.webdo.tn/2017/05/30/tunisie-adel-almi-lance-traque-aux-non-jeuneurs).

<sup>388</sup> Fahmi, G., & Meddeb, H. 2015, p. 3.

about the method of operation, political agenda, and suspected funding methods of these Salafists groups. Indeed, 200 active religious associations in Tunisia were receiving funding from Qatar varying between 100,000 and 3 million Tunisian dinars, which raises a lot of questions about Qatar investment intentions after accusing it of funding terrorism around the world.<sup>389</sup> In addition, it turned out that the mosques were the privileged spaces to launch the process of radicalization, spread propaganda, and recruit for the war.<sup>390</sup> In short, the revolution that was supposed to be democratic and liberal ended up taking a Salafist line because of a stacking policy that limits the visibility of Muslim identity and deems religion as a detrimental factor. Several researches have proven that the process of forced secularization can be extremely deleterious for social equilibrium given the close link between incisive secular policy and the emergence of conservative and extremist trends.<sup>391</sup> This observation applies as well to the Jews of Djerba known for a reprobation for the society. Do they have a similar societal anathema?

#### 4.2.2.2. The Jewish Withdrawal

The State's vision had always intended to impose a religious homogeneity instead of creating an equitable social harmony, which has unconsciously promoted the emergence of a culture of distinctiveness and communitarianism. The principal player of the Legitimate Identity (State) relies primarily on Islamic reference in its unitary institutional structures, which put the Jews by force of circumstance in a position of domination. This profound sense of injustice and feeling trapped in stigmatization has provoked a Jewish religious withdrawal from 1956 onward. It must be said that this this social confinement was an intended community choice aimed at maintaining a highly authentic expression of pure belief. On the other hand, the significant numerical reduction of community members is caused by a demographic constraint, social pressure, and religious uneasiness. One important point is that the decision to retreat into itself was a communitarian, deliberate choice made to avoid social alliances and full participation in the public sphere and prevent crossing the boundaries of religious prohibitions.<sup>392</sup> The withdrawal occurred with varying degrees of severity and was less strong with the European Jews “*Granas*” who settled in Sousse and Tunis.<sup>393</sup> In contrast, the

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<sup>389</sup> Speech by MP Leila Chettaoui on the Tunisian radio FM (14.06.2017).

<sup>390</sup> Werenfels, I. (2015) *Going “Glocal”: Jihadism in Algeria and Tunisia*, in *Jihadism in Africa*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, p. 62.

<sup>391</sup> Meserole, C. (2016). *The French Connection, Part II: Radicalization, Laïcité, and the Islamic Veil*, p. 1-10.

<sup>392</sup> Udovitch, A. L., Valensi, L., & Udovitch, A. L. (1980). *Communautés juives en pays d'Islam: identité et communication à Djerba*. *Annales*, p. 764-780.

<sup>393</sup> *Granas* are Sephardic Jews settled in Livorno and moved then to Tunis in 1685.

conservatism was notably intensive in Djerba, which represents the stronghold of Judaism, and managed to maintain its religious identity, autonomy, and morphed over time in a renowned centre for religious teaching, a pilgrimage place, and a "*theocratic republic*" preserving the Jewish tradition in North Africa.<sup>394</sup> Already, the choice to settle on an island cut off from the rest of the country gives an indication of Jews' prime intention to split off from national allegiance, cultural unity, and collective identity.

In Tunisia, the Judaic tradition represents a physical and mental hygiene based on patrilinearity and virilocality as well as a regulatory authority for religious, social, and commercial rights and duties. This identity attachment is not the result of religious fear or submission but rather reflects an intense piety and an affective bounding with Judaic heritage used as a powerful cultural shield against unwanted interference in social interaction. This conservatism is highly apparent in Jews' practical life and especially in their relations with the non-Jews. Thus, any form of sharing producing life elements such as religion, women, and food with a "*goyim*" is strictly forbidden.<sup>395</sup> To avoid a religious interbreeding with the surrounding society, Jews always chose to settle in a separate district. Djerba for example represents the unique example in the Maghreb having two districts (Hara Kebira and Hara Sghira) exclusively for Jews.<sup>396</sup> These two districts counted 17 synagogues, 5 centres of study "*Yeshivot*", dozens of "*mikveh*", and hundreds of mansions linked with an "*eruv*" and protected by prophylactic symbols, amulets, and mezuzaths.<sup>397</sup> Jews used this patriarchy and social closure to preserve their identity and devoted themselves to religious customs (calendar, circumcision, and Shabbat) and mosaic laws to form their main rules of life and rationale. This residential, social, and religious separation aimed at ensuring the survival of Jewish tradition, underpins a social position and repels all forms of religious transgression that may disrupt the community life. This defensive stance draws its legitimacy from an orthodox authentication incompatible with the prevailing social standard partly inspired from Islam, which subsequently limited Jews' relational, social, culinary, and economic interbreeding with the rest of the population.

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<sup>394</sup> Valensi, L., & Udovitch, A. L. (1984). *Juifs en terre d'Islam: les communautés de Djerba* (Vol. 1). Éditions des archives contemporaines, p. 133-134.

<sup>395</sup> Goyims are non-Jews, specified here as "Arabs"

<sup>396</sup> Hara means in the Tunisian dialect the Jewish quarter. Taïeb, J. (2000). *Sociétés juives du Maghreb moderne, 1500-1900: un monde en mouvement* (Vol. 14). Maisonneuve & Larose, p. 99.

<sup>397</sup> Eruv is a ritual enclosure (fence) that delineates the neighborhood and permit Jewish to carry objects outside on Sabbath and Yom Kippur.

The communication between Jews and Muslims operates at two levels: goods/services communication and message communication and both processes are restricted for male and female because of laws of family purity. For males, the restrictions address the area of food and commercial exchange and aim at ensuring ritual purity through a complete food self-sufficiency that should not transgress religious boundaries (non-kosher products). Moreover, on the eighth day after birth (circumcision), the "*Mohel*" formalizes a relationship restriction by reciting religious text addressed to the prophet Elijah to obstruct the circumcised (guardian of the identity) from having any physical relationship with a non-Jewish. Adding to that, on their Sabbath (every Saturday), Jews shut themselves away completely from the outside and prevent trading goods with the "*goyims*".

Unlike profane spaces such as workspace and sooks, the sacred spaces were originally forbidden to non-Jews, but as time goes, this ban is no longer current, which provides a positive sign and a first step toward openness to others. It is important to stress that in comparison with the male prohibition, female restrictions are extremely excessive. These restrictions subjugated women through a continuum of isolation that deprived them from working and even leaving the house without the presence of a male. Females were precluded from attending religious fest in synagogues and had to watch them from afar given Muslims' presence. This separation spread throughout the educational field and prohibited Jewish women from frequenting public establishments. In order to restrict interaction with Muslims and avoid cultural crossing, Jewish women have to exclusively enrol in Israeli curriculum as the school of Elinor. Moreover, they do not have the right to pursuit of advanced study and academic careers and are content to stay at home until marriage to avoid assimilation with non-Jewish society. The ascending demographic squeeze, social pressure, and religious normativity heightened Jews' social closure and religious confinement and created an unfavourable climate to live together harmoniously, which consequently launched waves of emigration that emptied the community. The precarious conditions encouraged Jews, particularly females, to take a different path and look for referential and unifying countries that respect and understand their faith and autonomy (France and Israel). Shiran Trabelsi, a Jewish teacher in Djerba, considers that Jewish identity is increasingly tightened by Islamic tradition and community standards, and it has become necessary to leave to Israel to acquire more social freedom given its equivalent religious and cultural environment.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> D. Cheslow (22.07.2016) *Le blues des Juifs de Djerba*. Courrier international, retrieved on 26.01.2018 from: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/tunisie-le-blues-des-juifs-de-djerba>.

Etymologically, Jewish names also reflect the resistant and protective dimension of their identity given their inspiration from religious text, prophylactic signs (fish, number five), powerful animals (wolf, lion), and sign of identification with the State of Israel (Ben Israel, Ze'ev). It is worth noting that this resistant stance was firmer with the secularized way of life imported by French colonists, as it threatened the continuity of the Jewish upbringing of the children, which explains their opposition of setting up a school of Israelite alliance in Djerba.<sup>399</sup> Despite the pressure of the “*Qaid*” and French authority, Djerba’s rabbis have shown repeated disavowal to a teaching provided in French that may decimate the religious instruction in rabbinical schools.<sup>400</sup> The intention behind this outright refusal was to restrain the impact of secular culture on youth and ensure the continuity of Jewish observance and values ensured by a daily instruction of children aged between 4 to 13 years to prepare them for the ritual “*bar mitzvah*”. This rabbinic instruction supervised the life cycle of Jew males (guardians of identity) to ensure the learning of the Pentateuch, fragments of the Babylonian Talmud, and the basis of religious and commercial law.<sup>401</sup> This conservative stance can be also noticed in the Jewish books that aimed at maintaining an adequate level of control of Jewish readings, schooling, and transmission of religious knowledge. In contrast, this limitation of local religious production led to a break with national Jewish unity (Livorni Jews) given their discordance in writings and books.

While it is true that the Jewish community was able to build an identity unit and a religious resistance to overcome its institutional and territorial weakness, its strategy could not stop the steady decline of community numbers caused by social inequality and religious unrest. Consequently, the community morphed into nationally amputated groups gradually disappearing and became a quarter of what they were in 1946.<sup>402</sup> This exodus is not only an issue concerning living persons but covered also buried people following the deportation of their remains to Israel, which negatively affects the standing of the Jewish community in the public consciousness. During the past three decades, Jewish cultural and social seclusion morphed into a territorial detachment and a severance from the collective identity, which has worsened the identity crisis between other communities. If the conservative approach of the Salafist and Jewish orthodox currents has so far proven pointedly negative in retaining the social

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<sup>399</sup> L. Valensi & A. Udovitch 1984, p 90-92.

<sup>400</sup> In North Africa, the Qaid is a notable in charge of tribe’s administrative, judicial and financial functions.

<sup>401</sup> L. Valensi & A. Udovitch 1980, p 470-478.

<sup>402</sup> L. Valensi & A. Udovitch 1984, p 61.

harmony, the question that arises here is whether the “*Project Identity*” was able to mitigate the rift in social cohesion.

#### 4.2.3. The “Project” Identity

The elites of society have gathered more importance in the last decades, which has led to a political and social struggle with the “*nation state*” particularly threatened by a new identity that casts doubt on its legitimacy. This modern current is doing its utmost to redefine its position and strategies in society in order to promote more liberal, democratic, and pluralist thinking and deeply engrain core human values, human rights, tolerance, and civic education in local culture.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, it fiercely opposes community resilience, isolation, and social inclusion that have fragmented society over the last few centuries and seeks alternative solutions to address identity enclosure and religious antagonisms by promoting more holistic and individual experiences.<sup>404</sup> It propels a new temporality of the notions of equilibrium and collectivity by reasserting responsible control over political and religious interference in order to expand beyond normativity boundaries. Its project consists of establishing a post-patriarchal society and reconciling believers with unbelievers after the failure of religion in meeting the needs of humankind.<sup>405</sup> For this reason, it stands up against traditional religious belief systems and religious submission that have caused the crisis of institutional legitimacy, social fragmentations, and generated exclusion and inward-looking attitudes.

In Tunisia, this identity current bemoans the institutional shift in favour of the interests of the dominant ideology, which after the rise of Islamism accentuated the religious division, discrimination, and social upheaval following “*Ennahda*” intention to revise democratic legislation, personal rights, and even state policy. A poll regarding the importance of Islam in Tunisian’ life found that 17 out of 1000 respondents (Project Identity) considered Islam unimportant in people's lives, a proportion that seems quite low but in comparison with Algeria (0.0%) gives real indication that this trend is further strengthening in Tunisia.<sup>406</sup> Most significantly, 57.6% of the respondents considered that Islam has a negative influence on Tunisian political life,<sup>407</sup> which confirms that liberal thinking is gaining ground as an alternative approach to establishing social protection regardless of religious, ethnic, or political

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<sup>403</sup> Castells 1999, p. 21.

<sup>404</sup> Touraine, A. (1995). *La formation du sujet*. In *Penser le sujet*. Autour d’Alain Touraine, p 29-30.

<sup>405</sup> Castells 1999, p. 21.

<sup>406</sup> Présentation des résultats des enquêtes (KAS), 2016.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid

considerations. This social movement deems Tunisian multiculturalism and multilingualism as opportunities for social progress, intercultural dialogue, and tolerance rather than sources of trouble and come up with harsh criticism to the progressive abandon of these concepts. It stood against establishing a linguistic and ethnic uniformity to nourish retrograde ideas in the name of national identity. During the 1990s, the policy of "Arabization" has made French language lose its vehicular use, and gradually the national education is succumbing to the sirens of Islamic ideology and embarking upon a path of fundamentalism.<sup>408</sup>

For the "Project" Identity, the social investment became a valuable and necessary tool to ensure social cohesion and prevent social beings from being excluded and falling out of the system. However, this social engagement confronts with religious restriction and normativity that fosters cultural confinement, religious isolation (Salafism), or even residential segregation (Jews of Djerba), which hampers the power sharing without religious and ethnic considerations. To overcome this crisis, the social actors went on the offensive to gain more social acceptance and undertook initiatives to compete directly with normative force (Legitimate Identity) and the religious conservatives (Resistant Identity). Alain Touraine considers that such confrontation and rejection of predefined social roles is not inciting religious hatred, on the contrary, they are first steps toward the de-structuring of societies that were for a long time submitted to absolute power of a specific ideological viewpoint.<sup>409</sup> In the same perspective, Christian Lefèvre claimed that the lack of confrontation and exchange puts in doubt the legitimacy of collective decisions, public policies, and democracy as a whole.<sup>410</sup> The project currently draws its legitimacy from a rising "informational democracy" highly visible in nonreligious movements (feminists, ecologists, nationalist) that attempt to produce new cultural codes and defend multiple identities to mobilize social fellow-feeling and cultural interbreeding.<sup>411</sup>

In Tunisia, the feminist movement forms a main axis of this identity trend and did not take long to oppose the danger of religious fundamentalism that promotes gender inequality and discrimination against women in family, social, and political circles. It stood against the patriarchy inherited from Arab-Muslim culture and against sociobiological centralization, all in the hopes of reaching a horizontal parity with men in terms of social and political participation. Women's power has surged in the municipal elections of May 2018 with 47.5%

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<sup>408</sup> Ellyas, A., Belkaïd, A., & Stora, B. (1999). *Les 100 portes du Maghreb: l'Algérie, le Maroc, la Tunisie, trois voies singulières pour allier islam et modernité*. Editions de l'Atelier.p 63-64.

<sup>409</sup> Touraine 1984, p. 165-169.

<sup>410</sup> Lefèvre 2009, p. 72-73.

<sup>411</sup> Castells 1999, p. 18.

elected female candidates, 29% of whom headed the list of parties.<sup>412</sup> This gender parity represents a unique case in the Arab-Muslim world and a major victory in the struggle for the recognition of women's equality. Most importantly, "*Souad Abderrahim*" was elected Mayor of Tunis, a first for a woman to take the responsibilities of a religious scholar, "*Sheikh*", in the medina of Tunis, the beating heart of Islamic culture in North Africa. This crowning achievement provides an indication of the Tunisian gradual shift from a relatively enclosed traditional society to a modern, egalitarian, and inclusive society.

It should be remembered that the primary intention of this modernist current is to establish a plural collective culture, ensure an identity-building continuum regardless of religious and ethnic consideration, and strengthen the shared sense of heritage. Di Méo stresses that it is impossible to conceive of a socially responsible, solidarity-based community, national unity, and territorial integrity without full consideration of collective heritage, particularly on issues of religious patrimony.<sup>413</sup> In Tunisia, there is a lack of awareness of shared religious heritage, even a refusal to conceive this diversity as a source of richness, which caused violent incidents storming Jewish and Christians' heritage without the slightest reaction from the State to protect this diversity and national wealth. Even worse, the State has contributed in imperilling this national heritage by sacrificing Christian flagship monuments such as Saint-Georges Church, a main Orthodox place of worship in Tunis until 1905, and Notre-Dame Chapel, which was replaced by a Sheraton Hotel. The State did not even prosecute the wrongdoers who ransacked without apparent reason Sfax's Beith-El synagogue at the time of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such criminal action inflicted on national heritage is not the first time and probably not the last, which reflects a tremendous religious rigidity and ignorance and a State slackening in protecting this heritage. If the Tunisian State, as stated in the Constitution, is the "guarantor of religion" and the "protector of the sacred", it seems that this protection covers exclusively Islamic properties, which contradicts the principle of freedom of conscience vitally needed in any democratic system.

The Project Identity ascribes greater importance to common religious pasts and envisages joint projects on developing cultural and religious openness in Tunisia through campaigning activities to promote a shared identity and cultural, religious, and ethnic intermingling. Its social

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<sup>412</sup> Charrouf, A. (06/05/2018) *Tunisie : la parité pour les femmes aux municipales*, retrieved on 04.04.2019 from [www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/05/06/01003-20180506ARTFIG00002-tunisie-la-parite-pour-les-femmes-aux-municipales.php](http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/05/06/01003-20180506ARTFIG00002-tunisie-la-parite-pour-les-femmes-aux-municipales.php).

<sup>413</sup> Di Méo, G. (1994). *Patrimoine et territoire, une parenté conceptuelle*. Espaces et sociétés, (4), p. 29.

actors launch annual awareness campaigns to calm tension and reduce the fear of religious difference and hold fundraisers for architectural restoration of sacral monuments. To keep the religious heritage alive, several architecture professors presently run with their students a few restoration projects of rural churches after their gradual deterioration after the agreement of Church property transfer to the State, which signed the death warrant of nearly 100 churches.<sup>414</sup> The problem stems from Tunisians' flawed understanding of national cultural collectivity that associates Jewish Christians' heritage with the colonization and explains the neglect and distancing from this key marker of identity. Several churches have lost their religious, social, and cultural vocation and have been turned into gyms (Sainte-Thérèse-de-l'Enfant-Jésus), police stations (Church of the Sacred Heart in Tunis), libraries (churches of Saint-Pierre and Saint-Paul), museums (church of Enfida), cultural cafés (church of Ghar Melah) and even shoe stores (the Saint-Louis chapel).<sup>415</sup> The revolution did not break the barriers of single thought that rejects unconventional ideas and encourages discrimination against dissenting persons, views, and beliefs (*Project Identity*), but it rather considerably strengthened the fundamentalism (*Resistant Identity*) and weakened the State's apparatuses (*Legitimate Identity*). It is true that the revolutionary movement freed Tunisia from the prevailing totalitarian and despotic philosophy, but it could not end the religious strife and social division because the national policy is still charged by ethnicity and communitarianism. This political stagnation is a grave blow to the continuing liberation struggle from polarization along national, ethnic, and religious lines that are further complicated by a new Christian turmoil.

#### 4.2.3.1. Christian Effervescence: The Assertion of a New Identity

Over this past decade, Tunisia underwent a religious upheaval with the arrival of 1000 African employees of Christian faith accompanied by their family to work for the African Development Bank in Tunis. This wave boosted the Christian socio-religious activities, added new dimension to plurality, and increased the churches' investment in the process of identity building. The emerging religious plurality spawned a period of deep ethical and religious reflection, altered the national religious scene formerly charged with conformity, and triggered a wave of conversion from Islam to Christianity.<sup>416</sup> These conversions indicate a willingness of a segment of the society to live a universality not rooted in local culture and opposes the "*Umma*"

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<sup>414</sup> Blaise, L. (16.11.2017) *Les églises de Tunisie, un patrimoine en péril*, retrieved on 05.04.2019 from: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/les-eglises-de-tunisie-un-patrimoine-en-peril>.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Boubakri, H., & Mazzella, S. (2005). *La Tunisie entre transit et immigration: politiques migratoires et conditions d'accueil des migrants africains à Tunis*. Autrepart, (4), p. 150-165.

totalitarian model as well as the conflicting concept of "*Tunisianity*". K. Boissevain sees in this shift a move toward modernity because it offers freer individual relations and breaks with religious rules predefined by the community.<sup>417</sup> This disjunction from Islam and nationalism drove a stake through the heart of national homogeneity, which set off alarm bells of the State and struck fear in the faith communities that consider this shift a religious, social, and political treachery.

The wave of conversion created an adversity and sometimes even a conflict between the church accused of having caused this religious shift and socio-political tension (evangelizing activities) and the State/Muslim community (Legitimate Identity). The Reformed church of Tunis has been roundly criticized for its support for Tunisian worship, which gave rise to social controversy and forced the church to withdraw its statement. This incident reflects the society's higher rigidity, radical otherness, and malaise in terms of religious choice and affiliation. One of the most disturbing things for the Muslim community is that some churches such as St. George and Charles de Gaulle previously headed by foreign pastors are presently run by Tunisian pastors (formerly Muslims), which is a bright move to earn citizens' trust and break down stereotypes linking Christianity with colonization. This evangelization has encountered a massive opposition because it promotes dissimilarity and apostasy, which is a reprehensible act in the social conscience that reached the point of no return.<sup>418</sup> Moreover, the revitalization of the evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism was considered an insidious form of colonization and a political threat to national unity given the historical relationship of the Evangelical Protestantism and the United States of America.<sup>419</sup>

This shift represents for a large section of the Tunisian population a treachery against Islam, society, and nation, which automatically triggers an identity resilience to staunch this religious regression through police intimidation and incidents of harassment from normal citizens committed against Tunisian Christians.<sup>420</sup> More serious still, Tunisian authorities put pressure on the owner of a premise (villa) occupied by the Pentecostal Church of the Champions to rescind the contract in a move aimed at calming tension and restricting the spread of this religious movement. This church is deemed a conversion booster that poses an imminent and serious threat for the Islamic identity of young Tunisians tempted by some religious course such

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<sup>417</sup> Boissevain, K. (2013). *Des conversions au christianisme à Tunis*. Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses, (4), p. 54.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid. p 53.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. p 55.

<sup>420</sup> These bullying occur often in the Pentecostal Church of the Champions in la Marsa. Ibid.p 56.

as the "*Sunday School*". This opposing stance is a result of fear and ignorance that deems this ecumenical movement as a "*Christian Reconquista*" and a jeopardizing identity project for social stability since it queries Islam's authenticity and symbolisms.<sup>421</sup> This movement wants to cast off the burden of imposed communitarian traditions and gain more religious, social, and political legitimacy. To this end, the Tunisian Christian delegation formulated an official request to gain national recognition, which has not been rejected neither approved and created a political disarray that implicitly refuses this plurality but holds out hope for more religious openness and progress on minorities' rights. Although a large part of the Legitimate Identity has become more tolerant toward Christians, conservatives' outright hostility and rejection has increased, which has heightened the religious clash and confrontation between communities. Christians are suffering across the country from severe discrimination, social exclusion, and family ostracism, which places Tunisia in thirtieth position on the fifty worldwide most repressive countries against Christians.<sup>422</sup>

My thesis is that the cause of such identity rigidity and negation of otherness stem from the ignorance of others' culture and religion but mainly because a lack of awareness of otherness recognition and acceptance. My main point is that it is possible to improve mutual understanding of religion, reduce religious tensions, go beyond passive acceptance of otherness, and teach religious tolerance through museums' projects and programs. The museum gained in recent decades a constructive position in society because it provides historical, anthropological, and religious reflections and promotes the feeling of belonging to a national collectivity. It has become today the epicentre of pluralistic culture and a philosophy to promote the perception of the interdependence of cultural, social, aesthetic, political, and religious arenas. The museum is not only a fixed space but also a symbolic setting of communication and interaction that involves a social relation linking social actors to different contexts of "*symbolic operativity*".<sup>423</sup> For J. Spirlbauer, the knowledge dissemination and experience exchange within museums are of great importance to facilitate the mutual understanding of cultural and religious contexts and to improve the quality of life and the public's welfare for posterity.<sup>424</sup> From the 1970s onward, the new museology has become a fundamental tool in raising cultural and religious awareness

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid. p 54.

<sup>422</sup> Aloys, E. (09.01.2018) *Index mondial de persecution des chretiens 2018*, Journal chretiens, retrieved on 11.04.2019 from [www.chretiens.info/39000/index-mondial-de-persecution-des-chretiens-2018/](http://www.chretiens.info/39000/index-mondial-de-persecution-des-chretiens-2018/).

<sup>423</sup> Schiele, B. (2001). *Le musée de sciences: montée du modèle communicationnel et recomposition du champ muséal*. Editions L'Harmattan., p.11.

<sup>424</sup> Spielbauer, J. (1987). *Museums and Museology: a means to active Integrative Preservation*. ICOFOM Study Series, 12, p. 271-276.

and understanding, and increasing sensitivity to ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. The museum turned into a major player in aiding the formation of an inclusive national identity, social incorporation, participatory citizenry, and a medium for transferring religious memory from one generation to another. However, Tunisian museums seem unable to adequately represent religious identity in a multicultural context because there is no genuine intention to integrate religious themes in museum discourse. Tunisia is facing a growing religious diversity and it seems to have no choice but to open up to it and invest in museum's religious, social, and political functions.

#### **4.3. The Religious Identity: A Constitutive Idea of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia**

It seems that tackling the issue of religious identity and diversity in Tunisian museums represents an offensive subject matter due to the State policy that denies religious particularisms and otherness. This negligence and indifference on matters pertaining to religion reflects Tunisian society backwardness and an unease to consider multiculturalism and multi-religiousness. Tunisia has to redefine itself, look at, understand, and question its religious past and heritage in order to inscribe it in the collective memory and enable religious communities to call to mind their own history. Such an approach could give answers to the great questions of identity that weaken the Tunisian society and come out of cultural, religious, and intellectual closure. Tackling the religious plurality and equality of these pluralities in a museum would reduce social division and mistrust and promote religious diversity. For C. Georgel, the notion of identity is constitutive of museum because it provides answers, shares a common culture, and reduces the concerns of distinction.<sup>425</sup> In this respect, exhibitions play an indispensable part in transmitting cultural and religious identities given their communicative and discursive dimensions that develop social ties and civic engagement.<sup>426</sup> Even more important, the processes of religion identity foundation is becoming a subject of growing concern and should therefore have a specific area of exhibition: a museum of religion. The museum should in a non-ideological manner tackle the issue of identification using "*identity strategies*" in order to become part of the process of identity building, socialization, and belonging.<sup>427</sup>

I think that questioning the similarity, discordance, and even tensions between religions in Tunisia should not be problematic; on the contrary, it would provide a rich framework for

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<sup>425</sup> Georgel 1994, p. 9-13.

<sup>426</sup> Davallon 1999, p. 378.

<sup>427</sup> Jean-François, B. (1996). *L'illusion identitaire*. Paris, Fayard, p. 18-27.

critical and reflective interaction and lead to a fruitful and instructive exchange of knowledge. I will show that the concept of a museum of religion is an ideal tool to raise awareness and promote social progress by questioning and prompting religious, cultural, and geo-historic issues in order to reduce community confinement and religious rigidity. H. Marzolf claimed that a museum should not play the comfort card but rather form public space of reflection to respond to the burning cultural issues generated in modernity and act as an agent of change to impact public confidence and trust.<sup>428</sup> Religious identity has become an important part of the museum's operations and has acquired a political and social dimension. For this reason, the museum should wholeheartedly emphasize the dialectic of identity and otherness and make the best use of mediation tools such as objects, immaterial media, and even contemporary artistic creations in order to bring to the forefront the ongoing sociocultural transformation.<sup>429</sup>

The Tunisian public is looking for authenticity, identity indicators, and markers, which can only be reached through a modern, friendly, and reassuring approach to religion. Creating a museum devoted to religion can positively respond to this claim and provide better knowledge and understanding of religious otherness and identities. It may even deconstruct misconception, exclusive way of thinking, and reduce discriminatory conduct through awareness raising and education for religious tolerance. The museum of religion has to be a collective creation that triggers a critique of collective knowledge and calls into question ideological clichés and social and identity concerns. It should be based on a shared reflection to allow visitors to situate themselves individually and collectively regarding religious and identity concerns. Moreover, it may add substantial value to religious heritage and give it a collective dimension by providing a sense of certainty that can help take away the fear of others. Its function should not be limited to conservation, aesthetic, and artistic optics but should rather trigger peaceful deterrence against ideological domination and resistance to achieve a social and religious equilibrium that serves the interests of the whole of society. Kurt Rudolph claims that the study of religion is the ideal way to gain new and critically reflective relationships to the tradition and reach a distancing of meanings through an abstraction from normative validity.<sup>430</sup> For my research, the study of religion constitutes an arsenal of critical concepts required to study, understand, explain, and transmit religious worship practices and communities.

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<sup>428</sup>Marzolf, H. (1997). *Une nouvelle entente pour les musées: ouverture ou menace*. *Muse*, 14, 4; 15, 1, p. 67.

<sup>429</sup>Chevallier, D. (2013). *Métamorphoses des musées de société*, la Documentation française. p. 11.

<sup>430</sup>Rudolph, K. (1978). *Die 'ideologiekritische' Funktion der Religionswissenschaft*. *Numen*, 25(1), p. 37.

Rebuilding confidence in others can transform religious otherness into a source of self-creation that links different communities through religious, cultural, and artistic interbreeding. Tackling religion in museums takes on meaning only by providing more visibility to religious otherness, without touching on religious sensitivities. By exhibiting religious shared and unshared components, multiculturalism frees the social beings from communitarianism and clarifies ambiguities regarding religion. Displaying productions, objects, and customs of different beliefs is not irrevocably doomed to failure, misunderstandings, or outright refusal, and my empirical survey finding (chapter IV) evidences this. J. Caune concludes that in cultural action potentially lies a full recognition of the different "other", which is done through multiculturalism, therefore; rejecting the otherness means automatically rejecting the culture.<sup>431</sup>

It may be recalled that otherness recognition does not mean the abandonment of existing norms and beliefs, on the contrary, it constitutes a prerequisite that makes these beliefs become truly shared and promotes a cosmopolitan environment. It has become vitally important to move beyond the distinction between "other's museum" and "own museum" because it blocks social coexistence, cultural and religious interaction, and relies instead on a unified approach centred on a dialect of identity and otherness.<sup>432</sup> In view of the multiplication of identities and the evolution of the religious scene in Tunisia, it would be more appropriate for a museum of religion to adopt a dynamic and interpretative approach instead of using a blueprint approach applicable to all contexts and often emptied of religious blending. In museology, the interbreeding between beliefs fosters interculturality and religious understanding because it builds a "Rhizome Identity"<sup>433</sup> among groups with different affiliations and discards the single and uniform "Atavistic/Root Identity". The religious assembling should rely on a rigorous, dynamic, and neutral approach to demystify established truths and call into question all certainties, conformities, immutable codes, and identitarian closure. It should transform exposures into discursive instruments to display religious and spiritual components, though different, as collective tangible expressions rather than imaginary constructions.

The museum of religion is not supposed to provide a discourse of truth but rather afford necessary reading keys to improve the way Tunisians understand religious issues and

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<sup>431</sup> Caune, J. (1992). *La culture en action: de Vilar à Lang: le sens perdu*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, p. 20-27.

<sup>432</sup> Chevallier 2013, p. 11.

<sup>433</sup> Rhizome identity is a non-inherited multiple identity made up from relationships woven at the present time. The concept is inspired from the blending of the rhizome roots connected with hundreds of other roots. Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, t. II, Paris: Éd. De Minuit, p. 20-37.

differences and thus contribute to a more informed, tolerant, and inclusive society. It should tackle society's paralysing rigidity, religious prejudice, and fear of others to rekindle a constructive critical spirit and bring Tunisians together across religious and ethnic boundaries. It is important to stress that the purpose of the study of religion is neither reconciliation and coexistence nor tolerance between religions by playing the role of an "ambassador" of harmony and peace that seeks to solve conflicts. The study of religion explores conflicts, explains its religious background, and draws parallels to similar issue in other cultural and political contexts and tries to stand against distorting representations, one-sided perceptions, polemics, stereotypes, and clichés.

At first blush, the idea of influencing society through a museum seems highly optimistic or even far-fetched, but according to several studies, museums are prime influencing bodies that play important and significant roles in the concept of society development, especially in developing countries.<sup>434</sup> If museums have proved incapable of enriching society, educating people, raising awareness, dispelling cultural and religious clichés, then there would be neither eco-museums, nor Museums of Man and Nature and museum of religions all over the world. Museums should clearly state their intention and firm commitment to mainstream social inclusion and equality in their contents because it is one of their first priorities.<sup>435</sup> This raises the following question: if museums exercise persuasion and influence at social, cultural, and religious levels in developing countries, it is not the case in Tunisia. What is the state of development of museums dealing with religion?

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<sup>434</sup> Teruggi, M. E. (2001). *La table ronde de Santiago du Chili*, Museum, vol. XXV, no 3, p. 129-135.

<sup>435</sup> Sandell 2002, p. 6-17.

## II. Religion in Museums

### 1. Emergence and Development of Museums

Since ancient times, humans have always been interested in collecting objects, whether scientific, natural, or devotional objects, for the purposes of explaining phenomena or fulfilling a desire of possession. In a sense, the first collections saw the light of day in ancient Greece that considered the temples' treasures as Art's repositories.<sup>436</sup> The first museums had religious overtones because they contained liturgical and religious objects protected and blessed according to a religious decorum. Over time, the passion collectivism morphed into a modern science known as museology that sought to find answers to increasing awkward issues depending on historical, cultural, and religious context. Museology does not draw only on a practical aspect but also deploys a theoretical conception and distinctive approaches. This theoretical approach depends on societal changes and public expectations and evolves with the expansion of research, science, and technology. The origin of a museum theory dates back to the mid-16th century thanks to researchers such as Olearius, Quiccheberg, Neickelius, Klemm, Graesse, and Coleman who have played a key role its development and renewal. Their theories have been of great help in developing and strengthening museums' value and position in society but have not given rise to an independent branch of science.<sup>437</sup> However, from the 1950s onward, the specialized literature on museum has come to fruition and became a full-blown discipline called "*Museology*".<sup>438</sup> This wide and heterogeneous disciplinary field regroups several sub-disciplines that differs from one country to another. Each country has its own categorizations, ranking, and epistemological standards that distinguishes it from other countries.<sup>439</sup>

My analysis focuses on exploring museums dealing with religion in Tunisia and assesses the relevance of sacredness issue in conceiving exposures exhibiting religious objects. It will shed light on their shortcoming in terms of exposure techniques and efficiency in transmitting

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<sup>436</sup> Drouguet, N., & Gob, A. (2014). *La muséologie: histoire, développements, enjeux actuels*, Armand Colin, p. 239.

<sup>437</sup> Erdős, A. (1977). *La Muséologie, sujet d'exposition*, la Conservation des collections exposées, un Musée des techniques de sécurité industrielle, Le Musée National de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, Museum Vol XXIX, n° 4, retrieved on 01.06.2017 from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001272/127267fo.pdf>, p. 189.

<sup>438</sup> Roland, S. (1993). *L'invention des musées*, Paris, Gallimard, p.16.

<sup>439</sup> Desvallées, A., Mairesse, F., & Conseil international des musées. (2010). *Concepts clés de muséologie*. A. Colin, p.7-90.

knowledge with a focus on appraising their reconciliation policy throughout the last decades. I draw my analysis on a number of perspectives from the studies of religion, museology, and museography to pinpoint the constantly changing challenges facing curators in displaying religious objects and in transmitting knowledge to unwarned public and school audiences. This section will outline the metamorphosis of Tunisian museums and their museographical progress linked to the advancement of technology. To this end, it is essential to delineate museums flourishing in Europe given the bilateral relationship between the Mediterranean's two shores and, in particular, the cultural influence of France during and after the colonization period.

### 1.1. Until the Renaissance

Since Prehistory, human beings have always sought to collect objects and gather figurines for a number of reasons: some personal, some religious, and sometimes just because of an object's scarcity. The collated objects, mostly gathered in the form of loot earned during conquest, were selected according to their value, symbolism, and rareness. This trend reached its peak when it came to treasures of ancient civilizations of Egypt or Mesopotamia that were excavated from tombs of people of great importance (funerary furniture).<sup>440</sup> The Greco-Latin civilization is the trendsetter of the passion for collecting works of art and religious properties, which did not take long to spread in Roman culture. The evidence comes from Verres praetor who seized in 70 BC all Sicily works of art to satisfy his passion for collecting rare and unusual items.<sup>441</sup> An act that displeased Cicero who denounced in his famous speech "*Les Verrines*" the forfeiture of works of art in the name of collectivism.<sup>442</sup> Following this occurrence, Roman law gradually pushed the issue of collectivism forward and placed new importance on regulating this activity. Thus, it classified objects into two legal ranks: "*patrimonium*" that consisted of all noble families' assets (personal inheritance) and collective legacy (family legacy), and "*Respublica*", which consisted of objects from war booties repatriated during conquests and bequeathed to the next generation.<sup>443</sup> It should, however, be stated that notwithstanding the priceless value of the war booties, their monetary, material, and artistic values were derisory in comparison with *patrimonium*'s worth. Nonetheless, it is due to "*Respublica*", that the notion of "sacred" began to be developed to the point of seized objects having been carried in triumph across cities to

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<sup>440</sup> Cabanne, P. (2003). *Les Grands collectionneurs* Ed. De l'Amateur, Paris p. 12-23

<sup>441</sup> In ancient Rome, a praetor is a magistrate of senatorial rank. The praetorship function was created around 366 BC. J.-C to alleviate the burden of the consuls especially in Justice. Piganiol, A. (1967). *La conquête romaine* (Vol. 3). PUF, p. 194-195.

<sup>442</sup> Clavis Scriptorum Graecorum & Latinorum Cicéron (1905) *Accusationis in C. Verrem liber VII*. Oratio decima, Imprimerie Libert, Paris, p.79-80

<sup>443</sup> Babelon, J. P., & Chastel, A. (2012). *La notion de patrimoine*. Liana Levi, p. 31-56

display their breadth, significance, and symbolic value. Thereafter as mark of respect, the Romans placed these booties in temples or shrines in which objects received specific ritual ceremonies in gratitude for the greatness of Rome and its deities. The process that collected objects underwent within temples was an initiation to museological activities that relies heavily on procurement, collectivism, conservation, and exhibition. Over time, this trend has spread across the ancient world and some temples such as the Alexandria temple was turned into a library, gathering archives and collections, then to a centre of study called "*Mouseïon*", referring to the "*temple of Muses*" that shelters arts' protective divinities.

During the Middle Ages, Europe went through a cultural metamorphosis and a religious strengthening that gave birth to a large number of worship places. Simultaneously, the passion for collecting grew and the power and possession tuned into a physical manifestation that affected medieval churches transformed into religious reserves of precious objects. Given their politic and religious authorities, it was not problematic for princes and clerics to retrieve religious and artistic assets from ancient temples and even from their property owners. Churches took over and replaced ancient temples in terms of conserving objects, which have turned into beneficial relics offering theological virtues. These places of worship added to the objects a sacred character and made from them "*treasures*" for humanity. As time went by, collectivism eagerness increased among royal courts and aristocratic families in France, Italy, Germany, Denmark, and England, which gave birth to the first royal and bourgeois collections. The thirst of possession lead to the creation of private collections that gathered stuffed animals, coins, exotic, religious, and art objects and geographical maps arbitrarily displayed in gallery halls called "*Wunderkammer*". For instance, Francis I requested to all French navigators to repatriate valuable items, scarce natural specimens, and religious and artistic masterpieces and succeeded in 1494 to organize his personal collection. Such collection reflects bourgeois' lust for collectivism and taste for exotic and religious matters because it attempted to reproduce objects' authentic environment and worship scenes, interpret Aboriginal peoples' way of life and beliefs, and to reveal details of their custom, ceremonies, and tradition.<sup>444</sup> For these wealthy and powerful individuals, these collections were insignia of their superiority, moral, and physical manifestations of power's continuity and sign of "*completeness*". In doing so, they made from these private exhibitions their personal properties and refused to allow the public from different social classes to access to their "*Wunderkammer*". The purpose of this restriction was to show

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<sup>444</sup> Pomian, K. (2004). *Histoire naturelle: de la curiosité à la discipline*. Martin, P. et Moncond'huy, D. Curiosité et cabinets de curiosités. Neuilly: Atlande, p. 12-39.

their superiority over others, demonstrate power and wealth by acquiring rare objects, and shed light on ties between their potency and ancestors' worship. This conduct that considered religious and artistic properties as personal items opposes the notion of heritage, in which collections should preserve, display, and transmit humans' trace persisted through the past to future generations. Even if collective heritage's concept did not exist at that time, the collectors have unintentionally contributed by bequeathing rare assets to future generations. They retained the honour of having allowed religious objects to subsist and give a candid picture of ancient beliefs and traditions. Feeding their curiosity and desire to possess, European collectors have succeeded to import valuable objects and precious works of art from all the world's corners to link preferences from one generation to another.<sup>445</sup>

As time passed, the notion of collective heritage started to develop until it gave birth to museums, thanks to these numerous private collections that morphed into genuine open showrooms conceived for the public.<sup>446</sup> In the second half of the 15th century, Italy was the starting point of public exhibitions and the catalyst of transmitting knowledge through galleries that displayed artists' travel diaries, travellers' road books, paintings, sculptures, and manuscripts. The Uffizi Gallery in Florence represents a perfect illustration of these new models of exhibition spaces that mirrors the genius of its designer "Medici". The prosperity of museums in Europa corresponded to Andalusian's golden age of calligraphy and sundial (gnomonic), which made religious objects used to measure the time, books, and calligraphic artworks substantial items of collections. For Oleg Grabar, several princes and sultans have managed to acquire impressive collections of books as a distinctive sign of abundance, wisdom, and knowledge.<sup>447</sup> These spaces of knowledge have been an initiation into museology that combined classical notions of conserving and exhibiting artifacts, indeed even the first working element of museology. Meanwhile, the trend of museums did not spread in North Africa, which started to recover from many bloody conflicts based on ethnicity or religion. It is only under the Aghlabids that Tunisia morphed into an important cultural centre in North Africa due to the effervescence of Kairouan, which became a house of wisdom and an intellectual centre of high fame opened to scholars.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Pomian 1987, p. 15-46

<sup>446</sup> Tony, B. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum. History, theory, politics*, p. 20-47.

<sup>447</sup> Oleg Grabar is a French archaeologist and historian specialized in the Islamic arts' history. Grabar, O. (1996). *L'ornement: formes et fonctions dans l'art islamique*. Flammarion, p. 60- 61

<sup>448</sup> Saïd, R. (1970). *La Politique culturelle en Tunisie*, éd. Organisation des Nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture, Paris, p. 14

### 1.2. From the Renaissance Onward

During this period, the trend of collecting and exhibiting objects resurfaced, and the passion to possess rare or unusual properties reappeared in Europe. All the same, this thirst for possession targeted treasures from antiquity by using texts of Greek and Roman philosophers Plutarch and Plato to decipher, locate and excavate buried and hidden objects in ancient monuments. In fact, the excavations carried out predominantly on Italian soil revealed many impressive archaeological and funeral findings dating to the Roman Era, which enabled collectors to acquire historical relics in the form of statues, vases, coins, and engraved fragments. These properties, primarily excavated from religious temples, have led to a large increase of conservation activities and launched a new classification of material remains. Simultaneously, great exploratory voyages proliferated in the mid-16th century to the 18th century and gave birth to new forms of collection, such as exhibits of natural history or exposures of scientific instruments such as the collection of the Elector of Saxony in Dresden. In this pattern, a new concept called “*curiosity cabinets*”<sup>449</sup> took shape in Europe and extended the passion of collectivism throughout the world as part of a continuum of thirst of exclusiveness born with the connoisseurs of art. These cabinets were initially a relaxing spot for princes and reflection and meditation areas for artists and scholars to develop their creativity and master new skills and knowledge of other civilizations. However, In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, their functions changed by putting more emphasis on common inheritance, thus allowing the replenishment of collecting materials, which gave a stronger push to growth of science in Europe.<sup>450</sup>

Thanks to these cabinets and manuals on selection techniques, classification and exhibition methods have improved significantly in Europe and particularly in Italy. These exhibition areas were fundamentally important for the survival of objects because they have not been selective or exigent in their choice of conserving objects. They did not put great emphasis on collecting rare pieces but rather sought to gather all kinds of items without any distinction made on object’s nature, base material, or provenance. More significantly, they carried out with maximum care the expatriated exponents and exhibited them according to specific theoretical and historical peculiarities. Through these galleries, the basis of the new museology began to form, and the theoretical outline of displaying artefacts began to take hold by freeing themselves of the exclusiveness to bourgeois and by sparking all social class interest. The only constraint

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<sup>449</sup> Davenne, C. (2004). *Modernité du cabinet de curiosités*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 160-172.

<sup>450</sup> Van-Praët, M. (1996). *Cultures scientifiques et musées d'histoire naturelle en France*, p. 143-149.

was that the exponents were not firstly displayed using showcases, but rather placed in cupboards, on tables or hung on ceilings and walls without labelling. Nonetheless, even if some religious objects have left temples, synagogues, and churches to land in such private areas, these properties were not placed on the floor out of respect for their sacredness and spiritual values. In England, some objects, such as bezoar and barsom were deemed “mystical” or “sacred” because they had healing capacities, which involved sometimes religious virtues from visitors.<sup>451</sup>

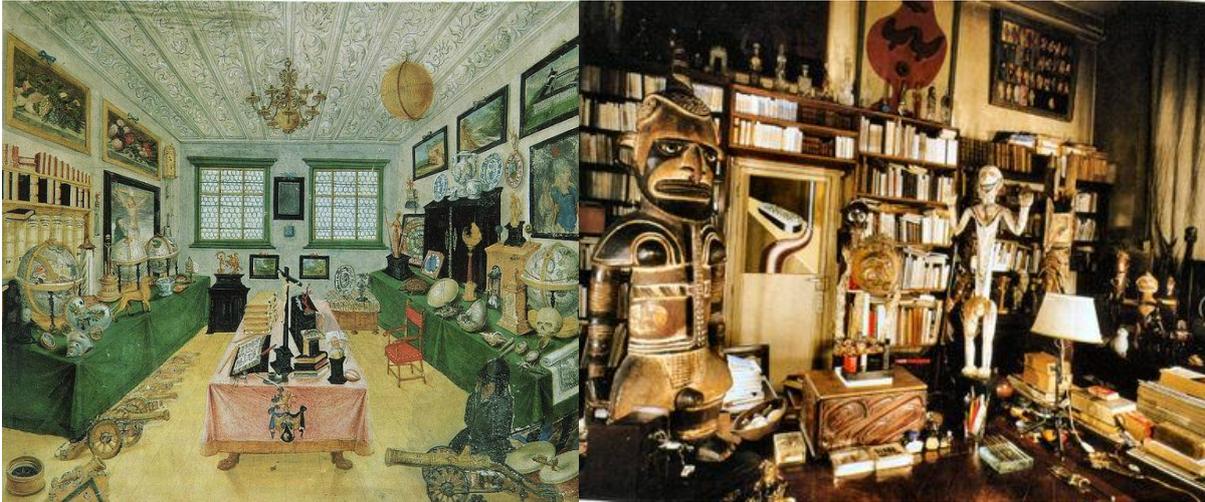


Figure 1 *Kunstkammer der Regensburger Familie Dimpfel*, Joseph Arnold, 1668 and the cabinet of curiosity of André Breton, Ulmer Museum. <http://soleildanslatete.centerblog.net/6578996-le-cabinet-de-curiosite-andre-breton>.

It should be mentioned that the first museums’ nucleus had a preference for works of art, religious objects, and navigation instruments because of the easiness of transporting, storing, preserving, and exhibiting them, contrary to naturalized specimens that were exceedingly tough to conserve due to their sensitiveness and the non-developed conservation method in that time.<sup>452</sup> Toward the end of the seventeenth century, natural specimens did not present a conservation problem anymore since its classification and systematic storage found its development thanks to scientific experiments based on new observations and reconstruction techniques, which gave rise to modern sciences such as animals’ anatomy.<sup>453</sup>

Over time, modern systematization and classification methods began to take shape in these showrooms by organizing items according to their nature, provenance, and value. The first galleries that stemmed from “*Cabinets of Wonder*” during the 16th and 17th centuries put great

<sup>451</sup> Schnapper, A. (1988). *Le géant, la licorne et la tulipe: histoire et histoire naturelle*. Flammarion, p 415.

<sup>452</sup> Péquignot, A. (2003). *Histoire de la taxidermie en France (1729-1928): étude des facteurs de ses évolutions techniques et conceptuelles, et ses relations à la mise en exposition du spécimen naturalisé* (Doctoral dissertation, Paris, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle), p. 367.

<sup>453</sup> Martin, P., & Moncond’huy, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Curiosité et cabinets de curiosités*. Atlande, p. 143-150

value on displaying science and arts' development and cared more about collecting and conservation far more than exhibiting. After years of progress, these “*wonder-rooms*” were divided into two different categories according to the items' nature: “*Naturalia*” consisting mainly of skeletons, fossils, teratological, dried insects and carapaces and “*Artificialia*” made up principally of antiques, religious objects, coins, weapons, artworks, navigation, and musical instruments.<sup>454</sup> These items were predominantly private properties, which required a prior agreement of their owners to allow visitors see them and receive a comprehensive explanation of their functions. The key turning point was the removal of these restrictive measures and opening up to a wider audience not limited to upper classes, princes, and scholars. In 1671, Amerbach's cabinet in Basel was the initiator of this move toward openness to the public, followed by Oxford's Ashmolean gallery in 1683.<sup>455</sup> This mobility further spread in England in 1710 and then in France in 1750 with the Crown Collections Gallery was installed in Luxembourg's palace.<sup>456</sup> This cultural incentive attracted visitors from every kingdom, who came to discover scarce paintings and sculptures and to be acquainted with beliefs foreign from their own. For instance, these private collections held thousands of archaeological artefacts smuggled out of many continents and more than 1376 paintings of famous artists such as Raphael and Titian.<sup>457</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, many countries decided to take charge of the collective patrimony and reclaimed their legitimacy to seize ancient bequests and collections. These countries pledged to launch a permanent institutional agency to handle the museological burden. Such confiscation first targeted the religious institutions that housed a huge number of religious, semi-religious, and even artistic objects. The most prominent example of this strict policy occurred in France with the Catholic Church's clergy assets forfeiture. The states subsequently used the seized objects to provide convenience to citizens in museums and to repay its debts after the revolution.<sup>458</sup> This action gave researchers and scientists greater opportunities to explore more deeply the theoretical reflections on objects' classification, which were restructured from that moment on according to specific arrangement of artist, theme, chronology, and schools' styles. The new classification aimed at avoiding visitors' confusion

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid

<sup>455</sup> Pomian, K. (2003). *Des saintes reliques à l'art moderne: Venise-Chicago, XIIIe-XXe siècle*. Gallimard, p. 271-300.

<sup>456</sup> Schaer 1993, p. 15-37

<sup>457</sup> Michel, É. (1948). *Musées et conservateurs leur rôle dans l'organisation sociale*, Office de publicité, Bruxelles, p. 11.

<sup>458</sup> Benelbaz, C. (2009). *Le principe de laïcité en droit public français*, Editions of L'Harmattan, coll. « Logiques juridiques », p. 59.

by creating a better labelling system and providing an aesthetic delight for the viewer. In the meantime, the science of photography improved and quickly integrated the museums' technique of exposition. Photography has shortened the distance between cultures and greatly helped artists to paint religious scenes and famous political notable portraits from all over the world. The net effect is that these artistic achievements have proven valuable assets in art galleries and contributed in fostering the first collections of fine arts in Europe.<sup>459</sup> In Tunisia, photography has a tremendous importance since it allowed many religious communities, and in particular the Jews, to commemorate important moments of their spiritual life by safeguarding pictures of their rituals, religious ceremonies, and traditions. This stock photography will be of great help to conceive the exposure scenario of my proposal given its focus on the religious dimension of Jewish daily life.

The procurement of substantial religious materials took place during the colonization periods of the Aboriginal population as part of what is called cultural "*oppression*".<sup>460</sup> These actions of appropriation were legitimized by a duty to save material inheritance of "*primitive societies*" that were unable to preserve it because of their sooner extinction.<sup>461</sup> Like the Renaissance, the nineteenth century re-examined the classical antiquity discovery and moved toward the Orient which interested researchers called "*plunderers*". In the Mediterranean, European expansion was done to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, which has been reduced to dust. Therefore, Archaeologists and researchers jumped at these opportunities in order to benefit from excavations and prospection in the East to reap the maximum benefit for European museums. Several testimonies of archaeological missions such as those of Agatha Christie Mallowan or Heinrich Schliemann revealed the thirst of European scientists to get themselves put down in history and mentioned the ferocity of the conquests that have not centred importance on Aboriginal populations' inheritance, faiths, and cultures.<sup>462</sup> Implicitly, conquests' purpose sought material and scientific analysis of cultural and religious inheritance, but explicitly reflected a needed assumption to procure archaeological assets as part of scientific missions. In Tunisia, these missions gathered archaeologists from the French School of Athens and museologists from European museums such as the British Museum who were requested to establish a scientific look at native culture and patrimony, broaden European reserve with artistic works, and enrich national collections. The majority of exhibited objects in the Punic

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<sup>459</sup> Schaer 1993, p. 15-37.

<sup>460</sup> Jones, D. (1996). *Home truth*, Museums journal, 96 (1), p. 20-22.

<sup>461</sup> Monroe, D. L. (1993). *Repatriation: a new dawn*, museums journal, London, p. 29.

<sup>462</sup> Schliemann, H. (1885). *Ilios, ville et pays des Troyens: résultat des fouilles de 1871 à 1882*. Firmin-Didot, p. 20-48.

department in the Louvre have been repatriated from Tunisia, even more, some artifacts of great value currently exhibited in the British Museum have been confiscated during these conquests. Indeed, seized objects transformed European museums into sanctuaries of art symbolizing humankind's history emblem of civilizations and culture that were considered unable to take care of their patrimonies. For D. Jones, this overzealous approach reflected an undue collecting thirst that caused a separation between cultures and their substantial inheritance in the interest of historical preservation.<sup>463</sup> Nonetheless, based on the requirement to maintain safely the world's heritage, French archaeologists provided "*legitimacy*" for the grip of archaeological finds seized from Tunisia and smuggled them out to their museums. Looking for scarce "*expedition trophies*", these scientists assumed the right of ownership for objects needful for their cultural domination. Several protectorates who settled in Tunisia, Algeria, or Egypt claimed to have a civilizing and noble mission to appropriate prestigious historical and religious assets in which personal gained profit prevailed over scientific research.

The nineteenth century was marked with the emergence of a large number of museums whose role was to unite, classify, preserve, restore, and exhibit pieces of art of all forms. This century was called "*the century of museums*" owing to galleries' expansion, museology's enlightenment, and museum culture's enlargement.<sup>464</sup> Museum's golden era has seen the birth of the Conservatory of Arts and Crafts in 1799, which has further strengthened museums' position in the public sphere and encouraged conservation professions. Progressively, museums of science, technology, and religious art increased significantly throughout the world, which has placed these cultural bodies at the heart of a socio-political analysis and concern. Several researchers claimed that the nineteenth century constituted the era of nationalism due to museums focus on exalting the particularities of national identities but also the epoch of addressing religious matter in public arenas as part of a trend that sprouted up everywhere the world over. This century raised the bar higher in the different ways of expressing relationship between man and reality and between man and objects and redefined new standards to interpret religious objects in a patrimonial environment.<sup>465</sup>

Various actors with different points of view approached religious objects as a prime sign of memory and meaning and started putting more emphasis on objects' original function, significance, and meaning by using better displays and interpretation methods. C. Paine claims

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<sup>463</sup> Jones 1996, p. 20-22.

<sup>464</sup> Georgel 1994, p.10.

<sup>465</sup> Erdős 1977, p. 187.

that the fight to control objects is an essential feature of human society and the human search for understanding meanings, mainly because mastering the meaning of things would ensure a great political power.<sup>466</sup> By that time, religious objects were highly significant and occupied a prominent place in the life of humankind given their spiritual and memory significance and ability to produce meaning, in particular if they appear in holy books.<sup>467</sup> In this sense, Paine noted that “*This use of objects to carry memories can, though, work at one remove; this was the intention behind biblical museums and exhibitions in Western Europe in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries*”.<sup>468</sup> This new emphasis on religion in museums puts primary placing on the sacred art of early and latter Christian art, and curators took another approach to religious artifacts that implied a revision of the epistemological, museological, and architectural design and material makeover. However, within this period, museums were the object of many criticisms and accusation of rigidity, regressiveness, confusion, and ideology-driven policies.

Whether valid or not, the reproaches have not only stained museums’ image and ethics, put in doubt and accused to be missionary, but also condemned this new trend as a whole for serving a political and ideological movement. Nazi propaganda during the Second World War and the decolonization movement of the 1960s were important factors that have beset a break between museums and audiences. Religious items were a central component of this conflict and misinterpretation, which has led to objects’ original owners claiming their properties were mistreated, misinterpreted, and taken out of context. Subsequent to this rupture, many movements of international collaboration did not sit idle and reacted in different ways to rescue museums’ reputation and rectify some objects’ meaning. After repeated efforts, this movement held under the auspices of the League of Nations managed to establish an arrangement and assert a collective ethic voice by creating the “*International Office of Museums (I.O.M)*”. The commission got down to work immediately and implemented emergency measures for museums ethic and published the first journal specialized in museology called *Mouseion*. Shortly after regulating museums ethic, the next focus primarily tackled the displaying techniques to improve new strategies of transmitting knowledge. In that respect, the I.O.M organized an international conference on museums studies and management and set new regulation for architectural and scenographycal standards.

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<sup>466</sup> Paine 2013, p. 46.

<sup>467</sup> Wharton, A. J. (2006). *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, replicas, theme parks*. University of Chicago Press, p 1-296.

<sup>468</sup> Paine 2013, p. 52.

It took a decade after the Madrid conference to set a new international cooperation body on museums within the framework of UNESCO called (ICOM). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) represented a non-governmental organization that supervises museums' administrative and institutional management throughout the world. It has nearly 30,000 members organized in National Committees and representing 137 countries and territories divided into Committees featuring experts from different sector consultancies specializing in museum work. ICOM established museums' Code of Ethics in forms of rule and systems of principles that provide a guiding principle for "*higher standards of conduct*".<sup>469</sup> It was not until 2007 that Museum official definition was drawn up during the 21st General Conference in Vienna stating that: "*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, preserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment*".<sup>470</sup>

The ICOM gave paramount importance to approaching religious materials and established four articles to regulate this area:

- Article 2.5: placed particular emphasis on treating religious sensitive materials: "*Collections of human remains and material of sacred significance should be acquired only if they can be housed securely and cared for respectfully. This must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from which the objects originated, where these are known*".<sup>471</sup>
- Article 3.7: underlined the importance of dealing with materials of sacred significance: "*Research on human remains and materials of sacred significance must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and take into account the interests and beliefs of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated, where these are known*".<sup>472</sup>
- Article 4.3: puts great emphasis on regulating the exhibition of Sensitive Materials: "*Human remains and materials of sacred significance must be displayed in a manner consistent with professional standards and, where known, taking into account the*

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<sup>469</sup> Edson, G. (1997). *Museum Ethics*. (ed.) London & New York: Routledge, p. 20-228.

<sup>470</sup> Official site of the ICOM retrieved on 03.06.2016. from <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>.

<sup>471</sup> International Council of Museums (2017) *ICOM code of ethics for museums*, Maison de l'UNESCO, p.11. retrieved on 16.06.2016 from <http://icom.museum>.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. p 20

*interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated. They must be presented with great tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples”*.<sup>473</sup>

From this point on, museum became more careful in dealing with cultural and religious objects and gave greater visibility to intangible heritage in order to increase awareness of its importance and encourage dialogue between Aboriginal populations and museum professionals as a means of contributing to the safeguarding of religious and cultural diversity. However, Tunisians do not respect the ethics guideline that regulates the conservation, dealing, and exhibition with religious materials for a lack of adequate human, material, and financial resources but also for the lack of mastery and proficiency in transmitting sensible knowledge and memory. Notwithstanding the cultural riches of the religious heritage in Tunisia, the collection dealing with religious matters suffer from a lack of professionalism and ethics and cannot put religious and sensitive materials in their proper context to provide better understanding of meanings.

Most significantly, these collections discard the beliefs and traditions of religious and ethnic minorities and keep them from appearing side-by-side with Islam in museum's arena. The factors mentioned above could justify my interest in creating a space that both respects ethics code of dealing with sensitive materials and gives the possibilities to others religious beliefs and traditions to appears and speak for themselves, which is one of the essential roles of museums. J. P. Jones claimed that the museum is “*the terrain across which some minority and indigenous peoples are reclaiming their cultural rights, for culture may be the only thing still owned by people*”.<sup>474</sup> Even if museums dealing with religious matters acquired worldwide in the last decades better pedagogical and instructive tasks that draw on scientific and technical revolution, Tunisia is still at the starting post. In Tunisia, religious materials face an increasing threat of “*touristification*” and “*folklorisation*” that does not consider objects' religious and spiritual dimension in museum's scenario and interpretation. Meanwhile, museums elsewhere turned into active educational spaces that both delight and educate the audience<sup>475</sup> and morphed into strategic players for social change by investing in public life, social teaching, and religious cohesion.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>474</sup> Jones, J. P. (1993) *Bones of contention*, Museums journals, 93(3), p. 25.

<sup>475</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, E. (Ed.). (2013). *Museum, media, message*. Routledge, p. 1-2.

<sup>476</sup> Sandell 2002, p. 3-20.

### 1.3. Modern Epoch

Although the 19th century gave birth to the phenomenon of "*Popularization of knowledge*" that aimed to facilitate the dissemination of the information to a wider audience, this process has often proven unable to make scientific information accessible without losing its inherent value.<sup>477</sup> The issues of religious aura, objects' misinterpretation, loss of sacredness, or disrespect to religious sensitiveness have been the core problems that face curators in the modern epoch in conceiving exhibitions that address religious matters. Curators confronted a bitter struggle in terms conscientiousness of religious materials, which required an adjustment of interpretation perspective and displaying strategies.<sup>478</sup> The challenge has been how to pin down religion in a secular setting and how to underline and materialize beliefs and traditions in a physical form (exposure) without infringing religious conviction.<sup>479</sup> Museums exhibiting religious materials are still struggling to raise awareness among people and demonstrate great tolerance toward people of all religious backgrounds, with full respect for objects' value and symbols. In this context, C. Paine noted, "*One of the odder consequences of our post-modern, multi faith world is that we feel we need to respect not just other people's beliefs, but also their symbols of those beliefs*".<sup>480</sup> In the same vein, several international bodies such as ICOM, ICOMOS, ICCROM and UNESCO encouraged further focusing on displaying sensitive and sacred intangible patrimony and invested considerable effort in order to pursue this line of works and ensure respect for religious materials.<sup>481</sup>

The constant improvement in the religious materials' condition of preserving and displaying was closely linked to the development of museology, museography, and interpretation models of sacredness. This betterment drew on advanced communication and mediation technologies that made from some museums such as St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Museum of World Religions, and Nicolet Museum of World Religions a media forum able to harness and transmit religious knowledge through channelled discourses. These museums shed light on recognizing and displaying similarities in others' differences and unearthed the ongoing changes in sociocultural and religious life, far from classical and historical standpoints. The distinctive feature of their approach to religion lies in their avoidance of provoking, challenging,

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<sup>477</sup> Giordan, A. (1987) *La modélisation dans l'enseignement et la vulgarisation des sciences*, Impact Science et Société, no 164, p. 310-337

<sup>478</sup> A. Edwards & L. E. Sullivan (2004) *Stewards of the Sacred: Museums, Religions and Cultures*. In: Sullivan, L E & Edwards, A (eds.) *Stewards of the Sacred*. Washington D.C: American Association of Museums, p. 9-21.

<sup>479</sup> McNally, M. D. (2011). *Religious Belief and Practice. A Companion to Cultural Resource Management*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 174.

<sup>480</sup> Paine 2013, p. 56.

<sup>481</sup> Smith, L., & Akagawa, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Intangible heritage*. Routledge, p. 10-32.

or infringing religious convictions, on the contrary, they attach great importance to ensuring high respect to religious objects and convictions. Such museums represent multidisciplinary centres that operate on a two-companion program: a pedagogical/scientific curriculum and a religious/aesthetic program. Tunisia should follow such model of work pattern because of its effectiveness in disseminating intangible knowledge and challenging stereotypes.

The twenty-first century was a century in which the focus increased on improving the dissemination of religious knowledge and providing richer exchanges across religious boundaries in museums. In order to get these done, curators undertook a retooling and modernization drive in terms of scenography and museography to foster the acquisition and assimilation of information and enable visitors to fully enter the knowledge-based society. The rejuvenation of communication and exhibition methods required the revamping of existing collections and implementation of temporary exposures to get audiences, closer to religious themes. Therefore, various museums relied on temporary exposure to attract a large audience and organize yearly two exhibits or very often renew their permanent collections each year.<sup>482</sup>

Over the last decades, the trend of temporary exposure dealing with religious matters reached its zenith due to the public appreciation and enjoyment of collections renewal that use apart from religious objects, audio-visual productions and graphic or plastic artifacts. The juxtaposition of materials has so far proven to be an effective method to catch the viewer's attention and curiosity, inspire a sense of wonder, and prolong visiting time.<sup>483</sup> The proof is that some touring exhibitions such as "*Shared Holy Places*" travelled across twelve countries and succeeded in meeting the public's expectation, which made it a high demand in others countries. This new trend had reaped great benefits for the blossoming of displaying religious materials using modern mediation techniques. The new display technologies managed to streamline the gaze circulation of the visitor and to reduce his visual fatigue through improved lighting and ergonomic tools that helped extend his stay at the museum. Within the sacred religious context, scenographers and museographers make stringent efforts to recontextualize objects' environment in order to avoid falling into isolation or distortion. This is accomplished through improved visual and spatial experiences by containing the recognition vectors (sensual perception) to break down the barriers between sacred and profane settings. In this respect, F. Lautman claims that religious materials need additional explanation and meticulous

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<sup>482</sup> Jacobi, D. (2012). *La muséologie et la transformation des musées*. La muséologie, champ de théories et de pratiques, p. 133-150.

<sup>483</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud, curator of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" organized at Bardo Museum via skype, 23.05.2018.

interpretation, firstly because of their rich, diverse, and complex symbolic values and meaning, and secondly because of the unfamiliarity of visitors with religious significance of previous and foreign cultures.<sup>484</sup>

Exhibiting religious objects should put emphasis on both aspects: the meaning, function, and symbolism on one hand and the aesthetic value on the other. One cannot go without the other. How may this occur? Even if labels represent a paramount exhibition tool in museology, its informative value remains very narrow because it confines itself to inform about an object's name, date, material of manufacture, or its ethnographic aspect (provenance, manufacturing technique). Visitors are often unfamiliar with religious materials of other faiths, which requires from the scenographer to provide them with a proper explanation and dose of information by relying on panels, borne interactives, or short videos and projections. This applies to Tunisian visitors who have limited knowledge of other religious communities' tradition and beliefs, which required using further interactive tools in the exposure "*Shared Holy Places*" to create a religious virtual simulation and better visitors' retention of information.



Figure 2 Interactive mediation tools used in "*Shared Holy Places*" ©Hamdouni

I do not regard virtual simulation as a noxious intrusion for religious sacredness or as a disrespect for sensitive materials because it helps visitors understand their meanings and symbolism and thus guarantees respect for other religious convictions. The priest M. Gruau claims that it is harmless to rely on simulation in conceiving a scenario of an exposure dealing with religious matters, however, curators have to be very careful not to fall in overusing technological support and making religious significance disappear behind technology.<sup>485</sup> The

<sup>484</sup> F. Lautman (1987) *Objets de religion ; objets de musée, Muséologie et ethnologie*, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, p. 176.

<sup>485</sup> Maurice Gruau is a priest and professor of anthropology at Rennes and Paris universities. Gruau, M. (1999) *L'homme rituel*, Médaillé, Paris, p. 96.

exposure “*Shared Holy Places*” was a rewarding and instructive experience for Tunisian visitors in terms of getting information, learning, and leisure. More than 80% of surveyed visitors appreciated the design, coherence, and consistency of the exposure, which are factors that should be taken into account in my proposal.

It is important to underline that until 2003, some religious terms such as Christianity and Judaism were prohibited in appearing in Tunisian television programs covering the country’s history and were replaced with the term “*ancient religions*”.<sup>486</sup> This censorship has often precluded the broadcasting of some episodes of the historical documentary presented by Lotfi Rahmouni just for the fact that they contained terms from different religious registers.<sup>487</sup> After the revolution, the situation changed, religious communities shook off the shackles of political repression and religion no longer represented a taboo subject for the people. Consequently, curators felt free to approach religious themes differently and to provide the public with necessary reading keys to understand objects’ significance. Many national museums such as Carthage, Bardo, and Mahdia broke with previous ethnological and historical perspectives that hampered religious objects to speak for themselves and organized temporary exposure that deal with religious themes. By contrast, local museums that also contain valuable religious materials remained mostly stagnant in a touristic, frozen, and restrictive perspective that only highlighted objects’ aesthetic value. This perspective, inherited from French colonization, does not allow proper weight to objects’ meaning, symbolism, and aura, which might adversely affect the intrinsic value of this material. Which is one more reason why it is necessary to create a museum of religion in Tunisia able to cope with religious materials’ sensitiveness, reveal the hidden part of the intangible and material wealth, and reconcile divided communities. However, prior to that, it is extremely important to understand how religious objects landed in Tunisian museums and what the main flaws in displaying this patrimony are.

### **2. Religious Materials and Emergence of Museums in Tunisia**

Tunisia was an intersection of many religions and a crossroads of many cultures, which explains why archaeological excavations have given high priority to religious materials. The archaeological dig was part of a European space exploration, not only to gain additional territories but also to repatriate valuable item to their museums. M. Fantar claims that behind the intention of getting ahold of precious and rare objects in Tunisia, there was an ideological

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<sup>486</sup> Interview with lotfi Rahmouni, 2019.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

aim to revive Christianity in the Maghreb.<sup>488</sup> It was a question of re-establishing a religious continuum that has cost Tunisia dearly in terms of its religious and cultural heritage. This ideological thinking explains why first excavations of the mid-19th century have intentionally neglected Islamic remains and sites and focused on prospecting ancient and late Christian vestiges. This period marked the beginning of prospecting temples and archaeological sites and compiling detailed sheets about the findings, the most important of which are those of Victor Guérin and Ch. Tissot.<sup>489</sup> Most significantly, the French archaeologists who conducted the first topographic study to assess Tunisian archaeological potential have intentionally excluded Tunisian researchers from excavation works to avoid exchanging their skills, expertise, and practice, and hide their illicit trafficking of valuable items.

Many companies that had a profit-making aim took charge of the archaeological dig of Carthage and repatriated scarce findings to European museums. Most of the repatriated objects had religious and funerary character such as steles, amulets, and statuettes given their symbolic and financial worth. More than half of the 2,000 buried stelae of the "*Tophet*" have been repatriated to France and few of them appear today in the Louvre Museum. The "*Carthage Exploration Society*" is a case in point of illicit traffic of valuable items and specialised in selling scarce objects abroad.<sup>490</sup> This enterprise discovered an extremely rare Roman mosaic of late antiquity and managed to repatriate it seamlessly to Europe by cutting it into small pieces; some fragments appear in the Library of Versailles and others in the British Museum. This trafficking has also tempted local elites such as the minister Mustapha Khaznadar, who was one of the most popular political figures thirsty for collecting.<sup>491</sup> Khaznadar managed to gather highly valuable objects and made his personal "*Cabinet of Wonder*" that he placed in his palace in Manouba. This bequest was confiscated in 1894 and used to shape the first Tunisian museum core, exposed later on at the Beylical Museum. Interestingly though, religious authority (clerics) such as Cardinal Lavignerie and Father Louis Delattre were in charge of the archaeological digs in Carthage. These skilled tradespersons were able to gather and sort extremely valuable Punic, Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine artifacts, mostly funeral and religious themed. After 50 years of excavation, Tunisia managed to shape the first museum (Carthage), which regrouped more

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<sup>488</sup> Decret, F., Fantar, M., & Fantar, M. H. (1981). *L'Afrique du Nord dans l'antiquité: histoire et civilisation; (des origines au Ve siècle)*. Payot, p. 31-46.

<sup>489</sup> Guérin, V. (1862). *Voyage archéologique dans la Régence de Tunis* (Vol. 1). Henri Plon, p. 30-45.

<sup>490</sup> Poinssot, L. (1914). *Les inscriptions de Dougga*. In NAMS, 13, p. 173

<sup>491</sup> M. Khaznadar Minister of Finance of Ahmed I Bey in 1837, Grand Vizier of Mohammed Bey and Sadok Bey from 1855 and Chairman of the Grand Advisory Council from 1862 to 1878.

than 6347 objects in situ.<sup>492</sup> At first, the collection was rather a deposit/reserve more than a gallery of exposition and had no displaying spaces, its main role was to protect artifacts from robberies. And through this, the collection faced successive thefts and damages given the deplorable condition of preservation, improper methods of storage, and unqualified personnel, which required an intervention.<sup>493</sup> Thus, permanent surveillance, inventories, and unannounced inspections were imposed in museums and a decree was implemented to avoid the degradation of artifacts.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, archaeological fieldwork benefited from aerial photography that gave a new impetus to territories' prospections. Therefore, digging expanded in Dougga and Jem and raised the number of collected objects, which required permanent storage places. It has been an urgent need to create a long-term conservation body to preserve and display objects to the public. This agency was called Alaoui Museum to the reigning bey at that time and was placed in a former beylical palace, which added a historic and symbolic value to the exposure. It gathered primarily religious antiques from Punic, Roman, and Byzantines eras and artistic works mostly produced by Jewish artists. It should be pointed out that the Alaoui Musuem took three years to open its doors to the public and has encountered great success with audiences. The trend of museums began propagating itself across the country and other museums emerged in Sousse, Kairouan, and Sfax. Louis Poinssot played a prominent role in broadening museums in Tunisia because he managed for twenty years the "*National Antiquities Department*" and strengthened the heritage's legislation.

In 1921, the Tunisian State became the sole owner and legal manager of all its antiques which reduced the plundering traffic of antiquities and put more emphasis on sharing and communicating knowledge with the public through exhibition.<sup>494</sup> After the independence, museums sprouted up like mushrooms across the country and attempted to provide a historical overview of the country that embraces different religious periods.<sup>495</sup> However, as already stated, the emphasis of work was on an archaeological approach that aimed at inventory, describe and display materials, predominantly religious, without giving a great deal of importance to the immaterial dimension of objects, which is a vital complementary dimension of the Tunisian

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<sup>492</sup> S. Ben Baaziz (2013) *Historique de la recherche archéologique en Tunisie*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, p 57-78, retrieved on 02.06.2017 from: <http://books.openedition.org/pur/34346?lang=fr>.

<sup>493</sup> R. La Blanchère (1890) *Rapport à monsieur le ministre de l'Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts*, in Doublet G., *Le Musée d'Alger*, Paris, E. Leroux, p. 20-25.

<sup>494</sup> Pimouguet-Pederos, I. & Clavel-Leveque. M. & Ouachour, F. (2013) *Hommes, cultures et paysages de l'Antiquité à la période moderne*. Mélanges offerts à Jean Peyras. Press universitaire de rennes, p. 64.

<sup>495</sup> Boyer, M. (2003). *Voir pour comprendre et dire pour apprendre : les enjeux des nouvelles muséographies en Tunisie* (1997-2002), monographie de muséologie, École du Louvre, p. 3.

common heritage. For Nejib ben lazreg, Curator of Lamta and Salakta museums, Tunisia had not the sufficient budgetary resources to invest heavily in this area and to take a comprehensive approach to religious heritage because its primary priority was investing in education, health, and infrastructure to foster its economic growth.<sup>496</sup> This resulted the mere archaeological and aesthetical approach used in Tunisian museums because it was the least expensive option for curators in that challenging time.

Over the years, Tunisia made a big leap in museology and created in 1961 two paramount agencies working on Patrimony: the “*Ministry of Culture*” and five years after “*The National Institute of Archaeology and Art*”, which took in charge operational management of national museums. Consequently, these bodies launched further archaeological excavation projects in Dougga, Utica, Bulla Regia, Sbeitla, Haidra, and Thuburbo Majus, and made huge religious findings of Numid, Punic, Roman, Jewish, and Christian materials, which have been placed in local museums or national museums such el Jem, Bellalis Maior, and Neapolis.<sup>497</sup> In a second step, Tunisia reconciled its Islamic heritage by rehabilitating religious buildings such as Ribats, Zaouias and medinas in Sousse, Monastir, Sfax, Kairouan, and Tunis and by creating the first space dedicated to religion: the museum of Islamic arts and traditions. Although it was placed in a religious building and addressed spiritual matters such as asceticism and marabouts, the collection made of religious materials such as fragments of carved wood from the Great Mosque of Kairouan, funerary steles, and manuscript sheets of the Koran adopted an archeologic and artistic approach to meet the requirements of tourism.

Tourism was a catalyst of exposition spaces and gave birth to further museums in Tunis, Kef, Gabès, Mahdia, Jerba, Chemtou, Nabeul, Kerkouane, and Nabeul. In parallel, religious collections started to develop thanks to individual donations and contribution of religious communities that ceded religious materials, keepsakes, and archives to museums with the aim of preserving them and elucidating social connections and religions’ coexistence between religious communities. In Tunisia, the architectural design of museums is made according to three alternatives: re-using a historic monument to house collections, building a new space fitted with striking architecture, or making use of “*pastiche construction*” an oriental-style architecture. The most frequent alternative was re-using deteriorated religious and historic monuments such as ribats, necropolis, cathedrals, and palaces to bring them back to life and increase the estate benefit. However, instead of benefiting from the spiritual values of the

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<sup>496</sup> Interview with Nejib Ben lazreg, Vurator and researcher at the Institut National du Patrimoine, 13.06.2019

<sup>497</sup> Slim, H. (1960) *Les facteurs de l'épanouissement économique de Thysdrus*, CT, VIII, 31, p. 51-53

religious spaces housing the collections to improve objects' value and sacredness, the tourism-centric view dominated and fell short of the requirement of displaying religious materials. Tourism focus is a double-edged sword for conceiving exhibitions dealing with religious materials because apart from its economic windfall, it has often resulted in some inaccuracies and falsification to amaze tourists.<sup>498</sup>

C. Paine claims that objects do not speak for themselves, because their setting up reflects curators' vision, which should be cautious in rallying objects together because it discloses a specific interpretation that should be properly understood by others.<sup>499</sup> The commercial perspective often smashes the religious and sacred dimension of artifacts and puts more emphasis on their ethnological values, which leads to the "*folklorization*" of religious customs and traditions by reducing them to mere folklore scenes of marriage and circumcision.<sup>500</sup> This misconception is very widespread in Tunisian museums that do not allow much scope for meaning interpretation and religious value-keeping objects, and thus fall in the trap of commercialization. Worse still, some ethnological museums display reproductions of religious objects in default of their scarcity without mentioning their inauthenticity to visitors. This reflects in part the priority given to the business aspect, even if it contradicts the ethical code of ICOM in terms of exhibiting religious materials.

K. Ford claims "*Museums are told to adopt a social enterprise approach, but most are already models of sustainability*".<sup>501</sup> This fully applies to Tunisian private museums housing religious materials, because despite the subject sensitivity, they trivialize its value and significances to multiply the number of visits and reap more benefits. However, it is strange to see some of these museums using modern scenography such as Dar Cheraït meeting with much public acclaim and welcoming about 150,000 visitors in 2012.<sup>502</sup> By contrast, public museums such as the "*Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum of Moknine*", which only rely on displaying religious materials using showcases, counted in 2008 54 paid entries.<sup>503</sup> These figures

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<sup>498</sup> Miliani, H., & Obadia, L. (2007). *Art et transculturalité au Maghreb: incidences et résistances: actes de la journée d'études*, Oran, 2-3 décembre 2006. Archives contemporaines, p. 65-72.

<sup>499</sup> Glencairn Museum News | Number 3 (March 30, 2017) *Religious objects in museums: an interview with Crispin Paine*, retrieved on 27.07.2008 from: <https://glencairnmuseum.org/newsletter/2017/3/27/religious-objects-in-museums-an-interview-with-crispin-paine>.

<sup>500</sup> Biaya, T. K. (1999). *Les ambiguïtés d'une expérience privée: réflexions libres sur le musée en Afrique*. Cahiers d'études africaines, 39, p. 751-759.

<sup>501</sup> Ford, K. (23 July 2012) *Museums are already social enterprises*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/jul/23/museums-social-enterprises-finance-development>, retrieved on 08.11.2017.

<sup>502</sup> Lagüéns, T. (2013). *Les musées en Tunisie, un état des lieux*. In *Les musée au Maghreb et leurs publics: Algérie, Maroc, Tunisie*. Documentation française, p 51.

<sup>503</sup> AMVPPC (2009) Détails des entrées payantes par sites, musée et par mois.

demonstrate that the success in attracting and familiarizing the Tunisian public with religious matters is largely dependent on bettering display methods and using advanced museographic devices. This point is relevant in my research and should be taken into consideration in my conception to ensure public satisfaction for religious exposures.

Tunisia legalized the privatization of museums to encourage some owners to bring sensitive materials out of the shadows and conceive new spaces of exposition, as was the case with the Jewish museums in la Goulette and that of Religion and Civilization in Hammamet. Nonetheless, some of these museums are not acting cautiously in terms of museological standards and respect to objects' significance, which contradicts labour standards and requirements of the Ministry of Culture decree. This deviation entailed putting measures in place to ensure a refinement of museums' work and compliance with the provisions of museums' ethic. Furthermore, it implied that public museums started to rethink the concept of displaying religious materials and developed an action plan for improvements. What does the renewal include?

### **2.1. The Museographic Metamorphosis of Religious Collections in Tunisia**

The Tunisian museum landscape constitutes a complex mosaic of galleries, showrooms, and exposition spaces, which almost all of them house religious materials. The dominant feature of collections is the archeologic aspect (56%) and the ethnographic aspect (32%). The majority of these museums are progressively developing news way of thinking, interpreting, and displaying their religious materials by adopting comprehensive approaches to religion using the participative museology as a tool to transform their space of exposition into a forum of knowledge. In line with that, Tunisia transformed over the last decades some religious spaces into museums to keep the sensitive materials in situ and avoid the issue of desacralization. The best examples are Sfax Museum of traditional architecture placed in a citadel and Monastir Museum of Islamic art placed in a ribat. This process has enabled them to keep the religious architectural heritage in optimum condition by bringing them to life and drawing more attention to religious materials. A survey conducted at Sidi Kacem Museum and Kef Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions showed that the majority of visitors especially came to visit the commemoration place for relics "Zawya", but ultimately opted to visit the collections of religious objects displayed in situ.<sup>504</sup> In 2004, museums dealing with religious matters began making a move toward modernization and reconciliation with the public, however, this growing

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<sup>504</sup> Gharsallah-Hizem, S. (2013). *Les musées et les problèmes d'accueil des publics en tunisie*, In *Les musée au Maghreb et leurs publics*, Documentation française, p. 77.

awareness concerned only few national museums. From that moment on, curators started to shape better strategies to display religious objects and launched numerous renovations to align their collections with international standards of exhibiting religious and sensitive materials.

Tunisia boasts a glorious and multifaceted religious past, which explains why almost eight of ten museums in Tunisia house religious materials or touch with different extents and depths on areas related to religion. In spite of this wealth though, at the time of visits, visitors do not notice the richness of religious materials because museums' focus-oriented approach gives greater weight to the civilizational, historical, and aesthetical dimensions of objects much more than to their significances and spiritual values. Museums' conceptions reflect an attachment to architectural, sculptural, and artistic beauty much more than to spirituality, religious symbolism, and tradition-holders. This carelessness reflects the State's great focus on bringing into the foreground an archaeological and historical perspective to avoid touching on a sensitive topic and creating ethnic and religious clashes. Indeed, museums cast aside all lived religious traditions of other confessions and concealed them in the meshes of society to shun a cultural and religious hegemony and avoid conflict. In contrast, heritage expert H. Jaïdi rose up against this policy and claimed that formal and non-formal heritage education, in particular of religious character, is conducive to creating an environment of tolerance, dialogue, and respect and deserves to be at the top of the priority list of Tunisian museums to fight identity closure and obscurantism.<sup>505</sup> Museums should provide more assistance to visitors to understand the religious significance of objects as an initial step to a wider understanding of their personal faith, people's faith, and the faith itself.<sup>506</sup> For this to happen, curators have to meet visitors most efficiently by using proper communicational pedagogy to help them understand what they see, support them to find new bearings, and accept criticism and depreciation in view of the sensitivity of the matter.<sup>507</sup> In Tunisia, the religious collections require urgent measures to refine their communication policy to give greater visibility to intangible religious heritage and increase awareness of its importance, which facilitates its appropriation without discrimination and encourages the safeguarding of these testimonies.

After the revolution, museums started to take religion seriously and provided better explanations of other faiths after many disruptive incidents occurred between religious groups

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<sup>505</sup> Jaïdi, H. (2019 Mai). *Nos musées pourraient mieux faire pour l'éducation au patrimoine*, retrieved on 30.06.2019 from: <https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/27120-houcine-jaidi-nos-musees-pourraient-mieux-faire-pour-l-education-au-patrimoine>.

<sup>506</sup> *Paine*, March 30, 2017.

<sup>507</sup> Barbe-Gall, F. (2012). *Comment parler de l'art et du sacré aux enfants*, Paris, Ed. Le baron perché, p. 6-9.

and even non-religious groups. Museums started to reconsider their moral messages, communicational approaches, and to rethink the selection and arrangement criteria of their content to give greater visibility to other confessions and improve understanding of and tolerance for differences. However, to achieve that, museums should revamp their “*expography*” to reach out to broad audiences, set interactive programs and make the information understandable for a better knowledge dissemination among non-specialized public.<sup>508</sup> It is essential to take into account the difference in comprehension among people given their diversity, whether it is “*Heirs*” (elite audience) or mass audience (uninformed public) derived from a heterogeneous society.<sup>509</sup>

Religion is a complex topic that requires a simplified but thorough explanation exceedingly tough to provide using analog museography that only relies on labels to give meaning to objects. By contrast, modern museography interweaves many approaches and dissolves distinction between art and religion in museums, and thus raises sensitivity for diverse cultures and faiths by promoting acceptance of difference that values religious diversity. For ease of understanding, museography achieved to reproduce the original context of objects and reshape their functionalities to enhance visitors’ experiences by means of advance support such as reconstructions, panoramas, video projections, and “*dioramas*”.<sup>510</sup> Based on the results of my survey, such exhibition designs have proven to be incredibly successful in impressing Tunisian visitors, wakening their curiosity and interest in religion and extending the visit times. Eight of ten visitors stated that they had a conclusive experience, learned a lot about religion, and appreciated the design, coherence, and accordance of the exposure. However, it is important to stress that the curators should carefully measure and dose the use of modern museographic tools to avoid falling in “*Theatricalization*”. Indeed, in case of misuse, modern exposure tools can deform the religious artifacts and often intentionally change their significance to please visitors and create excitement, which leads to the “*disneylandisation*” of museums.<sup>511</sup> The expert in museography S. Gharzalah has severely criticized such deformation and its downsides on message consistency, contrarily to Sylvie Brunel who claims that the touristic prospective is able to boost cultures and faiths in museums and to more effectively communicate knowledge

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<sup>508</sup> Gharsallah-Hizem, S. (2009). *Le rôle de l'espace dans le musée et l'exposition*. Muséologies: les cahiers d'études supérieures, 4 (1) p. 16-21.

<sup>509</sup> Bourdieu, P., & Darbel, A. (1969). *Lamour de lart européens et leur public*. Paris, Éd de Minuit, p. 246-250.

<sup>510</sup> The first diorama goes back to Paris in 1822. Daguerre and the painter Charles Marie Bouton conceived a panoramic painting on canvas presented in dark rooms using the play of light to give illusion and movement.

<sup>511</sup> Disneylandization means the transformation of local cultures to a facet of tourism globalization to please tourists. Gharsallah Hizem 2013, p. 82

with the public.<sup>512</sup> This problem is especially crucial in Tunisian ethnological museums, which converted their displaying techniques to a showmanship that lacks authenticity and scientific credibility. More importantly, public museums are predominantly tourism-oriented entities conceived for seasonal activities of tourists and do not give sufficient importance to local audience, constant concern, and socioreligious changes occurring in Tunisian society. This fact alone entirely justifies the need to establish a museum of religion to break with the frozen concept of exhibiting ancient religions and fossilized faiths in a purely archaeological perspective, and instead giving added value, visibility, and depth to the spiritual life. A museum of religion has not necessarily to deal with themes related to religious past; on the contrary, its strong point will be to address religious sensitive and timely topics to generate the public interest.

It is important to bear in mind that the Tunisian public is largely different from the European and Maghrebian public for many historical, cultural, social, and religious reasons. This means that Tunisian vision and understanding of religion is a bit harsh and needs further attention and caution due to the long political overshadowing of religion from the public arena. Thus, when it comes to religion, curators should pay close attention to their choice and interpretation to prevent offending the sensibilities of visitors with shocking and provocative concepts. At the same time, the design and approach of religious collections should not be too simplistic and monotonous because it easily triggers boredom and mental weariness and complicates the understanding of objects' meaning. The museum of Islamic art "*Lella Hadria*" represents the most glaring example that provides minimalist design and museography maladjusted to local public, which resulted a large disinterest and disaffection during low seasons.<sup>513</sup> With fifteen showrooms displaying more than 1000 objects made up of religious calligraphy, parchment of the Koran, fragments of Kaaba wall, miniatures, ceramics, and sacred items of mystical fraternities, the museum did not succeed in attaining its set objectives and build a local public. This observation leads to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the richness and scarcity of the collection, an inadequate design or a poor conception is able to provoke adverse reactions and lead to a reduction in the audience. This point should be given serious consideration in my proposal to avoid repeating the same mistakes and increase the probability of success of the museum of religion.

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<sup>512</sup> S. Brunel (06.08.2012) *Une planète disneylandisée?* Le blog histoire global, retrieved on 14.11.2017 from: [http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/une-planete-disneylandisee\\_2053](http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/une-planete-disneylandisee_2053)

<sup>513</sup> Lagiéns 2013, p 44.

In the light of experiences of exhibiting religious materials in Tunisia, the fundamental issue remains how to provide a lawless, comprehensible, and methodological approach to religion, while at the same time proposing a fresh and attractive concept for the public. I think that it is possible to find the right formula for ways of addressing religion and drawing larger audiences, but once this balance is achieved, the more difficult task will be to maintain the success. Familiarizing the Tunisian public with religious themes is a tough task because it requires on the one hand, considerable efforts to get them acquainted with other spiritual ways of life and religious values, and large investment to build loyalty and retain the visitors on the other. The museum of Dar Cherait represents an outstanding example of a balanced approach to religion made for local and foreign public and providing easier and widespread understanding of religious matters without compromising objects' sacredness and falling into banality.<sup>514</sup> Its program aims to instruct schoolchildren and raise awareness among young teenagers about the richness of religious diversity in Tunisia. Its success with the public encouraged the creation of further museums having similar approaches to religion such as "*La medina des 1001 nuits*", "*Dar zamen*" and "*Chak-wak*". More importantly, the religious collection of "*Chak-wak*" deals primarily with other faiths and offers its visitors a breath-taking religious itinerary that deals with polytheistic religion, the world's creation according to holy books, the tree of prophets, the Nativity of Jesus, Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea, the ark of Noah, and the sacrifice of Abraham.

It is important to point out that private museums are better at approaching religion and promoting cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding than public museums because they provide visitors with an appreciation of similar values that underpin religions. Unlike the handling of religious collections in public museums and galleries, private museums place a special focus on engaging interreligious dialogue, raising awareness, promoting a culture of tolerance, and creating space for religious encounter and reflection. Their main drawback, however, is having few scientific and structural shortcomings in terms of authenticity and exhibiting standards, which require new measures for improving genuineness of their exposure. The fact is that, despite efforts made to provide more visibility on other religions, some concepts are not in accordance with the requirements of ICOM in terms of exhibiting religious materials. Even more serious, some private museums gained a lucrative character and took all possible steps to improve their financial profits. In Tunisia, roles are reversed since instead of museums housing a restaurant as an annex, some restaurants such as "*Newfly*" and "*Dar Baba*" created

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<sup>514</sup> «Dar Cherait» is a museum belonging to a tourist complex that displays Tunisia's religious and cultural story.

their own ethnographic museums in situ to please their visitors with the reckless disregard for object sacredness.<sup>515</sup>

From my perspective, there is an even larger problem looming in exhibiting religious materials, which consists in archaeologists' perception of their findings. Their sense of ownership for excavated objects is similar to that of the owner of "*Wunderkammer*", which impedes curators from bringing such patrimonial wealth out and showing it the public. This draws excessively on the enhancement of religious heritage and obstructs the work of promoting cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding among citizens. For example, I wanted to gain insight into national religious heritage potential kept in museums' treasuries to finalize my proposal with concrete examples of religious objects. After attempts through various sources, I was unable to consult the religious materials kept in the reserve of the Bardo Museum on security grounds. There are several levels of difficulty in finding information, consulting collections, and even addressing visitors in Tunisian museums.

M. Pènicaud, the curator of "*Shared Holy Places*" claimed that he felt tenseness and a lack of coordination between teams of the Bardo Museum and the National Institute of Heritage, which reflects a lack of professionalism.<sup>516</sup> He showed some disappointment relative to work conditions and collaboration between actors because they missed an excellent opportunity to reap maximum promotional, cultural, and educational profit from the exhibition.<sup>517</sup> The current dismal situation of religious collections requires ways to overcome the challenges of visitors' disinterest in religious exposure and programs to help overcome prejudice and unfamiliarity with other religions out of fear of difference. Despite the efforts of H. Ben Younes to improve the condition of exhibiting sensitive materials, nothing came from all his efforts because he railed against an intended political blockage to deal with lived religion in a museum setting. The good dose of religious freedom that Tunisia gained after the revolution gave new impetus for considering the issue of religion in museums and for raising public awareness and understanding of religious otherness. However, the question that still arises is: why is the public still disinterested in religious exposure despite these efforts?

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<sup>515</sup> Jelidi, C. (2013) *Les musée au Maghreb et leurs publics: Algérie, Maroc, Tunisie*. Documentation française, p 14.

<sup>516</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

### 2.1.1. Public Disinterest in Religious Collections and the Policy of Reconciliation

Besides their considerable cultural and educational value, museums have become a postmodernist emblematic of “*mass culture*” and a space of innovation and entertainment. Unlike Germany, France, Scotland, Canada, and England that have made much progress in exhibiting religious materials, raising awareness, and promoting through exhibits inter-religious dialogue and the alliance of civilizations,<sup>518</sup> Tunisia is still caught up in the classical method of exhibiting, communication, and heightening awareness of religious issues. This partly explains the lack of public interest in religious exposure and shows that the problem is much more serious than a lack of concern for this type of exhibition. The challenge is even greater for Tunisia because museums generate interest only among higher ranks of society. Some figures seem worrisome since in 2009 only 2200 persons have visited fifty sites and museums, which begs the question about the causes of such a precarious situation.<sup>519</sup> Recent researches revealed that the decline of public attendance is much more linked to cultural matters and habit of the Tunisian than to financial concerns, which requires an urgent reconciliation policy to impart a new impetus and dynamism between the public and its religious heritage, formerly hidden from museums for political reasons.<sup>520</sup> It therefore seems important to differently target the unwarned young public, fix the structural issue, and fill the outstanding gaps of exhibition.

#### 2.1.1.1. Structural and Communicational Issues of Religious Collections

Reception, communication, and exhibition conditions are the three driving forces that link a museum to its public. These elements are not only limited to material aspects but also involve an intellectual dimension to ensure visitors’ satisfaction and help enhance their experience.<sup>521</sup> Creating an ideal atmosphere of learning and affection improves the quality of the information and adds clarity and understanding of religious significance, which require from the museums more efforts to improve visitors’ physical, ergonomic, psychological, and intellectual comfort. When it comes to religious exposure, the task becomes more difficult given the complexity of this subject and visitors’ religious sensibilities and tendencies. There is no doubt that museums exhibiting religious materials in Tunisia are below international average and standards in terms of exhibiting sensitive materials and should improve their in-house strategy (reception,

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<sup>518</sup> Poulot, D. (2009). *Musée et muséologie*, Paris France: la Découverte. Présentation du CIDOC CRM, retrieved on 31.07.2017 from: <http://fr.slidesshare.net/patriceboeuf/presentation-du-cidoc-crm>,

<sup>519</sup> Hazgui, H. (07.03.2011) *Patrimoine : Les musées tunisiens*, conférence de Habib ben Younes a Art’Libris.Encore du pain sur la planche. La presse de Tunisie

<sup>520</sup> Ibid

<sup>521</sup> Boylan, P., & Woollard, V. (2006). *Comment gérer un musée* : Manuel pratique. UNESCO publication, p 105.

communication, and exhibition) and external strategy (advertising and commercial management). Lucien Mironer claims that museums should improve three key strategic moments to ensure the visit success through effective communication.

Invitation phase	Arrival phase	Visiting phase
<p>+Should afford:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Proper signage intended for pedestrians and motorists.</li> <li>-Advertising poster.</li> <li>-Brochures' circulation in hotels, tourist offices, schools with companies informing about exhibition's theme, free access, entrance prices, and opening time.</li> </ul>	<p>+Require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A sufficient amount of human and physical capital</li> <li>-Operates by means of guided tours, and audio guides for foreign public.</li> </ul> <p>Should afford:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Detailed documentation on permanent and temporary exhibitions for individual visitors.</li> <li>-Elaborated itinerary plans with an indication of visit duration, decent toilets, a restaurant, and a bookstore</li> </ul>	<p>+Should afford:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Horizontal and vertical circulation easiness (lifts, escalators, stairs)</li> <li>-Convenient displaying system</li> <li>-Highly effective panels conceived for uninformed public</li> <li>-Proper lighting</li> <li>-Adequate dimension of museographic furnishing</li> <li>-Suitable showcases' height and Architectural design.</li> </ul>

Table 2. Visit's key strategic phases. Mironer 1994.<sup>522</sup>

The communication and information strategy is a prerequisite for all museums seeking to expand the audience size and maintain sustainability. When it comes to religious collections, the communication process has to be more targeted, customized, and focused to engage younger audiences and attract a non-specialized public. M. Pènicaud claimed that the Bardo Museum has failed to give a special echo to the exhibition “*Shared Holy Places*” and to attract considerable attention due to its poor visibility and miscommunication.<sup>523</sup> Contrarily, the exhibit “*Eveil d’une nation*” that took place during the same period had a high public and critical acclaim because of its successful communications strategy.<sup>524</sup> This indicates that museums displaying religious materials should seek alternative ways of advertising such as visual displays and short films and implement them in public areas such as malls, hotels, airports, and train and metro stations to adjust and anchor the importance of religious diversity in the collective sub-consciousness. The museum of Guellala opted for this course of communication and managed to lure visitors to visit its collections that display local customs and Sufi religious life by distributing leaflets in hotels, offering tariff arrangements for families and young people,

<sup>522</sup> Mironer, L. (1994). *Les trois moments de l'accueil vus depuis l'Observatoire permanent des publics. Culture & Musées*, 4(1), p. 133-134.

<sup>523</sup> Interview with Manöel Pènicaud.

<sup>524</sup> Rambourg foundation was a partner in this exposure and financially boosted the communication component.

and providing transport facilities. Based on life-size dioramas and modern display techniques, the storyline of the exposure tries to remove the negative image some people have of Islamic mysticism or Sufism and provides a good explanation of Sufis' religious sensibilities. However, many religious collections often overlook such powerful factors of communication, which makes visitors feel lost, confused, and unable to follow the exhibition trail and understand objects' significance. In *"Shared Holy Places"*, 17 respondents voiced criticism and raised questions related to the non-availability of explanatory brochures and information pamphlets. This observation shows that explanatory leaflets has become an effective tool to ensure a smooth course of visit and provide a greater level of details in exhibitions dealing with religion.

Another important drawback of Tunisian religious collections remains their maladjusted reception spaces and welcoming services, which are often boiled down to front-office ticket sales that do not allow proper weight to visitors' well-being and experience. Indeed, providing good reception contributes to the richness of the visitor experience and to the establishment of mental connections with the staff working at the museum. In real terms, this means that making visitors feel privileged, fortunate, and expected help visitors gain a sound understanding of objects and contribute enormously to the success of the visit. Human assistance should always be available when needed, and scenographic installation should be designed to provide a variety of information and interpretation to meet a range of visitor needs. Informative signage and orientation panels are crucial tools to help visitors move about easily, change itineraries, orient themselves in the space, and ensure effectiveness in time management. Interior signage is a key element in going deeper into certain aspects in a relaxed and friendly way and in creating powerful conditions of comfort, relaxation, and clear expectations, which enhance the assimilation and dissemination of knowledge.<sup>525</sup>

Similarly, good exterior signage is critically important to improve the visibility of the collection from the road and help to guide visitors to the museum. However, in Tunisia, the facades of religious collections are aesthetically unpleasant and poorly presented to the public with lowest indications to orient or inform visitors about the collection. There are several examples for such poor presentations; among them, the religious collection placed in the mausoleum of *"Sidi Bou Krissane"* appears at the top of the list in terms of lamentable state. Notwithstanding the sacral, historical, and patrimonial values of the monument and the religious collection, the museum is currently in a lamentable state in terms of signage, state of cleanliness, and display techniques.

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<sup>525</sup> Vitalbo, V. (2000). *Comment le public utilise-t-il les repères de guidage de l'activité de visite ?*, La Lettre de l'Ocim, 74, p.18 -20.

More serious still, other museums place no value on their aesthetic side (entrance, yards, and exits areas) and leave valuable religious objects unprotected in a chaotic state in their yards. The best example of this remains the yard of Carthage Early Christian Museum that gives an accurate idea of the alarming negligence of the aesthetic aspect of the museum's surrounding area.



Figure 3 The entrance of the mausoleum "Sidi Bou Krissane" and the yard of Carthage Early Christian Museum. <https://www.leaders.com.tn>. Retrieved on 15.07.2019

With the exception of the Bardo Museum, the rest of exhibition areas that display religious and sensitive materials are not adopting a firm attitude of professionalism to build opportunities for interaction and dialogue with the public and to enhance visitors' experience. These dismal conditions of signage, cleanliness, preservation, and exhibition is most alarming and very serious and partly explain distance between public and religious collections.

### 2.1.1.2. The Disinterest of the Public

Several studies have shown that youths' free time is not used skilfully and is mainly devoted to leisure activities (coffee, television, computer, phone), which is largely due to the low number and lack of attractiveness of youth centres and museums.<sup>526</sup> Teenagers believe that museums are geared toward adults for the required intellectual abilities to decode messages or toward children who are easy to impress.<sup>527</sup> This is also valid for Tunisian youth who do not spend much time in cultural spaces and do not attach much importance to exposure dealing with religious matters. In Tunisia, there is a common misconception that it is not necessary to visit museums to discover the country's heritage and historical wealth because archaeological

<sup>526</sup> Véronique, G. (2005). *Pratiques électorales et rapport à la lecture des jeunes en voie de marginalisation*. Agence de sociologie pour l'action, p. 10-25.

<sup>527</sup> Lemerise, T., & Soucy, B. (1994). *Le point de vue des adolescents sur les musées: synthèse d'entrevues faites auprès de dix adolescents*. Production Université du Québec à Montréal, p. 1-14.

remains are everywhere.<sup>528</sup> This is where the problem is: Tunisian museums offers a purely historic and archaeological product in which objects' artistic, creative, and religious dimension do not come out well. This focus on artifacts' archaeological value, ancient religions, and millennial traditions is an out-of-date concept because it does not allow visitors to feel involved in the storyline of the exposure or to go through a heightened spiritual experience. Conversely, it triggers a visual boredom due to the frozen displays and low degree of interpretation. Museums dealing with religious matters should rise from their graves, give new life to artifacts, and morph into places of life, exchange controversial debates and critical reflections that explore religious issues from different perspectives. Moreover, their approach unintentionally shows a historical confrontation between cultures and opposes representative religious codes, which creates several dualities such as Punic/Roman or Arabs/Berber. However, in a multi-religious society such as Tunisia, museums should address sensitive and current issues and help youth connect with people of other faiths and denominations by providing them with keys to understand different religions and by promoting tolerance and respect to differences.

Contrary to common perception, the unfamiliarity with museums is the root cause of public disinterest in religious exposure far more than the cost barriers. Free admission is a definite advantage in construing the idea of museum visits, but it remains of secondary importance and far from being the decision-making factor.<sup>529</sup> In Tunisia, there is the widely held belief that museums are tourist spots and a melting pot for elites and the intellectual class. The figures of my survey prove this ascertainment since 88.3% of the interviewees had bachelor's degrees, of which 56% were employees and 37.7% were students. The Tunisian minister of education Neji Jalloul stressed that the flaw of cultural, artistic activities and courses on general history of religion in schools and college, and the lack of investment in mentoring youth in museums through field trips, holds the responsibility for giving museums an elitist aspect in collective imagination and for provoking disinterest in religious exposures.<sup>530</sup> This implies, therefore, additional work from schools and museums to familiarize young people with exhibition spaces and help them learn about others beliefs and traditions. This shift demands a strategic realignment of educative perspective in schools and museums to promote civic education and learning to appreciate other people and their differences because understanding always leads to acceptance and peace. A museum of religion can be the ideal spot to start at an early age with

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<sup>528</sup> Interview with Lotfi Rahmouni.

<sup>529</sup> Bourgeon-Renault, D., Gombault, A., Le Gall-Ely, M., Petr, C., & Urbain, C. (2007). Gratuité des musées et valeur perçue par les publics. *La Lettre de l'OCIM. Musées, Patrimoine et Culture scientifiques et techniques*, (111), p. 31-39.

<sup>530</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul.

being acquainted with other religions and develop an understanding of the diverse religions existing in the world. By addressing matters of public current concern, the museum of religion should inform people about other religions, their historical background, and their common points in order to trigger critical reflections and dispel religious ignorance and hate growing up in Tunisian society.

Familiarization with other religions through museums is crucial to dispelling the groundless fears of difference and diversity and to fighting against fundamentalism, religious withdrawal, and xenophobia. This process occurs on a long-term basis and demands continuous effort to ingrain trust in other religions and build links between museums and the public. Bourdieu stressed that culture is the product of a continuous and full-fledged education and that getting familiar with the arts is not a love at first sight but is rather done over a long period.<sup>531</sup> For this reason, it is better to start it at a younger age and to use a straightforward approach and unambiguous concept to suit the capacity in understanding and interpreting of the uninformed public, otherwise this hurdle would cause disinterest.<sup>532</sup> This problem is particularly acute in Tunisian museums because the borderline between religious exhibitions and the public is still large in absence of a clear policy that rethinks religion in situ. Curators should provide a shift of focus and resources toward the revitalization of religious exposure by using dynamic forms of exhibition and addressing the lived practices and spiritual dimensions of religion. In order to get these done, curators should reconsider their display for religious materials such as archaeological items stripped of its religious meaning in order to give greater visibility to the immaterial dimension of artifacts, which is a vital complementary dimension of religious heritage. The challenge ahead is raising awareness, stimulating reflections, provoking critical thinking, and animating visitors to go toward the other and create empathy toward other faiths without making from religion a capital doer.

Clearly, it is not easy to convey and materialize emotions and ways of thinking and feeling of believers of past times to visitors through exhibitions, but it is achievable and necessary as in the case of Holocaust museums in which objects generate thrill and emotion.<sup>533</sup> Tunisian museums dealing with religion need to rid themselves of their secular character that is close to antiquary and hinders the process of providing meaningful and critical reflection. On the contrary, they should produce scenarios of exhibition that draws the eye and captivates the

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<sup>531</sup> Bourdieu & Darbel 1969, p 90.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. p 71.

<sup>533</sup> Paine 2013, p 110.

imagination of visitors and balances their curiosity and eagerness to discover different religious experiences. Several exposures using appealing concepts for religion such as "*Life Before Death*" have proven successful in attracting wider public audiences and sparking their interest in religion and the conception of life and death. Curators used photographs and testimonies of celebrities concerning life and death to address in a creative way these matters and to elicit visitors' curiosity.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, the exposure "*Amen*" organized in Montreal came out with an unprecedented concept to address religion in a refreshing sociological perspective that draws parallels between religion and sport. Given its increasing popularity, curators introduced hockey as a new religion in Canadian collective imagination and highlighted its significance in people's daily lives through a temporary exposition after the qualification of the hockey team to the Stanley Cup Final.

In his book *Living with the Gods*, N. Neil MacGregor claims that exhibition on religion should find new ways to trigger a lot of reflection on what lies behind objects and tradition animated by high spirituality and how it influences peoples and cultures.<sup>535</sup> As director of the British Museum, MacGregor developed many thought-provoking and creative concepts to attract curiosity and public approval around spiritual imagination and connection with the divine in a unique and innovative way. However, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, it might be necessary to be astutely careful in choosing contents and pairing objects. Religious exhibitions should not compare, take sides, or defend of any one belief; on the contrary, they should promote a balanced dialogue and provide an appropriate interpretation to guard against igniting religious sensitivities. Things can go wrong, as was the case with the exposure "*Obscenity*" in Italy after displaying religious figures in provocative situations, which provoked anger in conservatives and Catholic associations and led to demonstrations denouncing this defamation and blasphemy.<sup>536</sup> While some countries such as Britain focused on showing exclusively the "*sunny side*" of its religious history, contrary to Germany who used a rigorous appraisal of its history, Tunisia is showing neither one nor the other side of its religious history and richness. The secular character of museums and their focus on displaying ancient religions using exclusively archaeological resources are the critical constraints holding back progress toward the betterment of religious exposures. Nonetheless, the situation started changing in the last two

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<sup>534</sup> Official web site of the Museum of world religion, « *À la vie, à la mort* » 19 mai au 6 septembre 2010. retrieved on 21.11.2017 from : <http://www.museedesreligions.qc.ca/nos-expositions/passees/a-la-vie-a-la-mort>

<sup>535</sup> MacGregor, N. (2018). *Living with the gods: on beliefs and peoples*. Vintage, p. 1-512.

<sup>536</sup> *Obscenity, nouvelle expo polémique* (21.02.2012) le monde des religions. Retrieved on 21.11.2017 from: <http://www.lemondedesreligions.fr/culture/obsenity-nouvelle-expo-polemique->

decades after strengthening cooperation with leading countries in the field of religious museology and strategies toward reconciliation with the public.

### **2.2. The Reconciliation Policy of the Public with Religious Collections**

Managing museums represents a highly delicate task larger than constructing an instructive visual discourse and displaying artifacts, it requires first meeting the audience's higher endpoints to make from them its best ally.<sup>537</sup> In Tunisia, this point is not taken into account in introducing audiences of all ages to religious exhibitions and in showing the peaceable aspects of faiths. The focus on displaying archaeological items relative to ancient beliefs caused an identification problem in museum settings because many persons could not identify themselves with this heritage because it belonged to other civilizations.<sup>538</sup> From 2004 onward, museums realized the urgency to rethink their discourse, setting, and allure in order to rejuvenate their works and reach a bigger audience. Curators started to reflect upon performing the mediation of religious materials by making use of advanced support to add emotion and significance to artifacts and provide visits with entertainment and enjoyment. The purpose behind this reconciliation policy was the need of confronting public disinterest, fostering religious dialogue, reducing tensions between religious communities, and promoting cultural vibrancy. For this reason, the ministries of culture and education designed an action plan to introduce museum visits to schools' history programs to make this activity a habit from an early age and enable schoolchildren to deepen their historical and cultural knowledge. They also encouraged clubs and associations through subvention to organize cultural outings for regional and on-site museums to boost open attitudes toward collective inheritance. For their part, museums started to freshen up their images with the aim of matching better the needs and expectations of the local audience.

As a first step, museums encouraged young creators, designers, and artists to replenish museums with their works to add value to religious exposures with new materials, ideas, and perspectives. This initiative helped reduce tensions between archaeologists and artists due to the prior neglect of plastic and artistic works in museums' concept and the strong focus on using archaeological artifacts. There is often conflicting views between museum professionals on how to display artifacts, however, this balance of perspective may be used positively to perform the

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<sup>537</sup> Camille, D. (2013). *L'innovation et le numérique*. Conférence de Michel Serres. Les Musées au prisme de la communication, La médiation au Louvre LENS, p. 12-36.

<sup>538</sup> Gharsallah-Hizm, S. (17.08.2014) *Les Tunisiens et les musées: À quand la réconciliation*. Retrieved on 03.08.2017 from: <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/14809-les-tunisiens-et-les-musees-a-quand-la-reconciliation>.

collection's design and to better meet the public requirements.<sup>539</sup> As a second step, museums played the card of free entrance to increase visit numbers with the agreement of 2010, which offers free access to state employees, Tunisians residing abroad, children under 6 years old, pupils, students, teachers, journalists, military and police officers, disabled people, persons accompanying handicapped, and ICOM and ICOMOS personnel. Moreover, museums give free entrance for everyone on national holidays, every first Sunday of each month, April 18 (World Day for Archaeological Sites) and May 18 (World Museum Day). As a third step, museums started hosting or conceiving temporary exposures as enhancement tools to attract the public and retain their interest in religious exhibitions. It is important to stress that these temporary exhibitions were quite effective in attracting public attention to religious matters despite the fact that they did not address lived beliefs and traditions of Judaism and Christianity. The choice of the working angle was critical to avoid stealing controversial reactions and trampling over religious sensitivities. Curators should be highly cautious in choosing the scenario of the exhibition to avoid shocking audiences or drop below expectations.<sup>540</sup> It was necessary to wait for the revolution in 2011 to break free from political duress and push forward to discuss and display religious matters of other confessions in museum settings. Temporary exhibitions such as *"Trésors de Chine"*, *"L'Éveil d'une Nation"* and *"Shared Holy Places"* used cutting-edge display technology to exhibit religious materials, and their outstanding success is a resounding reflection of the positive impact of using modern museography to display religion.

The exposure *"Young Man of Byrsa"* was the first Tunisian attempt that addressed a religious theme using new sciences and display techniques and succeeded in attracting a large number of visitors (40,000 visitors in six months). It has displayed a skeleton of a robust male (1.70 cm) who died in the 16th century BC at a young age (between 19 and 24 years old) and his funerary properties to give visitors an insight to Carthaginian religious, funerary, and imaginary beliefs and to the physical appearance of their ancestors. Dermoplasty specialists rebuilt the original appearance of the person and sound specialists ensured a convenient sonorous atmosphere to provide visitors with an immersive experience that stimulates their minds and awakens their senses, emotions, and perception of the sacred.

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<sup>539</sup> Davallon, J., & Le Marec, J. (2000). *L'usage en son contexte. Sur les usages des interactifs et des cédéroms des musées*. Réseaux. Communication-Technologie-Société, 18(101), p 173-195.

<sup>540</sup> Clément, P. (1994). *Représentations, conceptions, connaissances* In A. Giordan, Y. Girault, & P. Clément (Eds.), *Conceptions et connaissances*. Berne.p 7-38.



Figure 4 Museography of the exposure Young Man of Byrsa <https://www.lorientlejour.com> retrieved on 03.09.2018

The exposure staged “Arish”, wearing a long tunic linen, adorned with jewellery, and surrounded with showcases built in the wall. Moreover, curators have carefully chosen the colours, sounds, lights, and labels to enhance the aura of the religious materials and create an atmosphere of deep spirituality.<sup>541</sup> The unexpected success of the exposure showed that the museographic innovation and advanced mediation support are effective tools in successfully addressing the spiritual dimension of beliefs and achieving a high degree of satisfaction.



Figure 5 The mapping of ancient gods sculptures. <https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/20060-mapping-sculptures>. Retrieved on 04.09.2019

Graphic designs, media, audiovisual, special effect, and mapping have given new impetus to religious collections by reanimating objects and bonding visitors to their heritage. The clothing of objects shaped an alliance between artifacts and digital arts, built bridges to Tunisia’s religious past, and put visitors’ emotions and imagination to the test. By using sound and video

<sup>541</sup> Official site of IMP, exposition (octobre 2010 - mars 2011): « Le jeune homme de Byrsa » au Musée de Carthage. <http://www.inp.rnrt.tn/> retrieved 11.07.2016

effects, the mapping puts objects into motion, restituted colours, and revitalized objects with significance to help visitors conceptualize objects in their religious and historical context via visual stimulation. Similarly, the exhibitions "*Coincidence*" that took place in the Christian Basilica of El Kef and "*Interference*" organized in the medina of Tunis used the technique of mapping to revive Christian and Islamic materials. The exhibition "*Street Art Museum: Uthina, Myths and Legends*" took the idea a step further to encourage young talent into promoting their religious heritage by transforming archaeological sites into immersive exhibition spaces. Based on religious scenes inspired from Roman mosaics, 30 students of archaeology managed to conceive videos of religious scenes related to the Roman collective psyche, ethos, and religion. These scenes interpreted Roman imaginary, mythological, and symbolic traditions according to scientific data and projected them on Roman temples' remains.

Strengthening the immersive experience in museums has proven extremely effective in familiarizing the Tunisian public with religious matters, disseminating knowledge, and extending the visiting time. I should give this point serious consideration in conceiving the design of the museum of religion to keep it in high demand by the Tunisian public and sustain the popularity of the collection. In my view, dedicating a museum for religion in Tunisia has become a social upgrading project highly viable to harmonize society and inform people about other confessions. This project should not be restricted only to State's budgetary since it can receive funding from the European Union, UNESCO, ICOM, and ICOMOS which are increasingly investing in promoting ethnic and religious co-existence, understanding, and harmony. The museum of religion is able to reconcile Muslims with other faiths, open up other perspectives, and promote religious acceptance. It will be a way out of the culture of distrust, intolerance, and religious misunderstanding that deeply plagued Tunisia after the revolution. The familiarization process with other religions should start at a young age between the walls of museums, cultural clubs, youth centres, and through school outings, which is not the case in Tunisia. So, what does the Tunisian Minister of Education foresee for this issue?

### **3. The Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Schools and Museums**

Schools are not places for dogmatic teaching but rather forums of knowledge construction that question certitudes and destabilize prejudices in a spirit of constructive criticism.<sup>542</sup> Thereupon, Tunisia should rethink its transmission strategies of religious heritage and invest more massively in awareness raising and education for religious understanding and tolerance. The

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<sup>542</sup> Robine, F. & Rojat, D. (2006). *Enseignement et vérité en sciences : la question de la vérité en sciences expérimentales*, in *Laïcité, vérité, enseignement*, CRDP de Bourgogne, p. 93.

religiously motivated incidents of violence over the last fifteen years show that Tunisian collective memory and social harmony are threatened by a religious ignorance often expressed in social rejection, including physical assault against non-Muslims and even against “*Nonpracticing Muslims*”.<sup>543</sup> The compulsory religious instruction of Islam in school poses a problem with regard to the understanding of other faiths given its denominational dimension that only focus on raising awareness to Islam. More serious still, some universities such as the Institute of Sciences and Energy Technologies of Gafsa made from “*Islamic education*” a weekly curriculum requirement. Instead of offering courses on interreligious dialogue that address ignorance, stereotypes, and prejudices, Tunisian schools propose a confessional instruction that unintentionally shapes a refusal of recognition and negative images of the other. Most of religious textbooks still contains a significant influence of the spirit of the “*Salafiya*” and some of their chapters seem to contradict the religious and political reality of contemporary Tunisia.<sup>544</sup> Although some secondary education textbooks stress the need to avoid conflicts of religious order and the importance of dialogue and tolerance, it might already be too late to implant value of religious acceptance in post-secondary schools. The abstinence of instructing other religions at schools reflects a fear to stir strong negative reactions on Islamic sensibilities and being accused with the proselytization of those beliefs. Besides, the scant attention paid to Tunisian religious diversity at schools reveals a communication tension and turbulent relationship between religious institutions and the State.

After the end of the dictatorship that impeded the visibility and diversity of Tunisia’s religious scene, providing pupils with information about others’ beliefs in an accurate and unbiased manner became a priority and an educational challenge for the State. N. Jalloul claims that this step toward awareness raising and education for religious tolerance became a nationwide response to prevalent stifling rigidity and religious “*inculture*” and avoiding confrontations of religious differences.<sup>545</sup> The minister went on to say that, many school disciplines should put emphasis on the teaching of religious fact to allow a better understanding of religion as a dimension of diversity within a pluralistic population.<sup>546</sup> It is essential to abandon the current one-track approach to religion focused on Islam and provide pupils with balanced coverage of beliefs to preserve a genuine plurality and true diversity. The religious fact is not a prior

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<sup>543</sup> After the revolution, many act of violence occurred against Muslims converted to Christianity, not fasting Ramadan or praying for pious saints in Zawya.

<sup>544</sup> Feki, M. & Maruani, N. (02.05.2007). *Des manuels scolaires tunisiens d’instruction religieuse prônent la tolérance et le dialogue*, retrieved on 11.07.2019 from: [islamlaique.canalblog.com/archives/2007/05/02/4815588.html](http://islamlaique.canalblog.com/archives/2007/05/02/4815588.html).

<sup>545</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

civilizational characteristic, but rather an omnipresent reality in modern societies,<sup>547</sup> and the opening up of schools to all its shades would encourage Tunisians to take pride in the common heritage of humankind based on the same principles. The teaching of religious fact at school breaks with the codes of religious dogma and promotes greater openness, awareness, and respect for religious diversity because it widely explores religion in all its forms, dimensions, and issues. These courses would allow pupils to gain more insight into others' beliefs, resources, and traditions largely hidden from public view and become acquainted with heritages of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. The multidisciplinary approach to religion and integration of different knowledge areas is neither a form of proselytism nor anti-religious incentive nor an upgrading of a religion in particular, it is comprehensive reflection to advance religious understanding and get out of the old thought patterns and unique way of thinking. The basis for reflection is not to criticize sacred texts, enumerate religions' goods and faults, and value or devalue one religion over another, but rather opening the mind to the richness of religious diversity and seeking for a common ground of tolerance and respect.

N. Jalloul believes that teaching religion is a complex and delicate task that requires a broader and more neutral approach, suitable textbooks, an ethics code, and qualified teachers in philosophy and history of religion.<sup>548</sup> Teachers should maintain scientific and religious neutrality to ensure distant reflection without anachronistic judgment. The neutrality should not be philosophical since it would threaten schools' educational mission, but rather a denominational neutrality to foster religious understanding.<sup>549</sup> N. Jalloul claims that teaching religion is quite similar to political teaching in terms of deontological and didactic aspects, tolerance reinforcement, and citizenship education.<sup>550</sup> For this reason, teachers should pay special attention to their speeches to avoid introducing religion as dogma or as theory, but rather as a social history and human experience analysed from historical and anthropological perspectives.<sup>551</sup> The socio-historical approach allows pupils to be acquainted with a shared heritage and a common past linking the different religious communities. For that purpose, it is a priority to start this familiarization course in the first grade of primary school to inform pupils about the existence of other faiths. It is necessary to work on a positive "*comparativism*" to put emphasis on religious similarities and shared values to familiarize young pupils with the

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<sup>547</sup> Delumeau, J. (2003) *l'enseignement du fait religieux*, Paris: CRDP Académie de Versailles, p. 33.

<sup>548</sup> Interview Néji Jalloul.

<sup>549</sup> Buisson, F. E. (1911). *Laïcité*, in Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire, text reproduced by Charles Coutel, *La république et l'école*, Presse Pocket, p. 222- 224.

<sup>550</sup> Interview Néji Jalloul.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

acceptance of difference.<sup>552</sup> The valuing of religious diversity is a key asset for learning and understanding others, and it is not a threat for Islam but an opportunity to show that Islam accepts difference and encourages societal participation. Along the same lines, N. Jalloul referred to the Danish school system, which despite its close liaison with the Lutheran Church provides primary pupils with a glimpse into pluralist religions and addresses all life's religious and non-religious phenomena in the secondary cycle.

Tunisian school curricula should put more weight on exploring religious matters in constructive, comparative, and critical perspectives to explain to pupils that although Abrahamic religions are not identical, they are not foreign to each other. This reflection should not imply a negative "*comparativism*" that classifies religions according to distinctive differences by virtue of God or a sacred book but rather provides pupils with keys to understand different beliefs and ways of thinking. R. Nouailhat, a specialist in the history of religions, claims that querying the functional difference of worship places and discrepancy of religious habits and customs increases understanding and appreciation of differences and promotes a culture of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religions.<sup>553</sup> Nouailhat believes that eluding religion from school curricula and giving a negative picture of some faiths leads to systematic negation of otherness and explains the prevalent religious withdrawal and violence based on religion.<sup>554</sup> In Tunisia, very little effort, if any, has been made to familiarize young pupils with other belief systems, which must change for the greater good of society. Schools must transcend the ideology of confessionalism in education and include interreligious courses in their programs. Teaching religious fact refines the critical spirit, scientific curiosity, and doubting manner of thinking of pupils and fosters unity, diversity, and spiritual emulation instead of rivalry.<sup>555</sup> The increasing pluralization of religion requires that schools acknowledge Tunisian religious diversity in an atmosphere of inclusiveness and gives greater visibility to others' beliefs rather than seeking to avoid them. This reflection and philosophical enquiry on religion does not prompt pupils to believe or not believe but rather trains their mind to roam and stimulates their critical thinking and civic-mindedness.

Informing pupils about other religions, their historical background, and their common points creates trust, removes fears, and promotes openness to others, which is currently lacking in

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> Nouailhat, R. (2004). *Enseigner le fait religieux: un défi pour la laïcité*. Nathan, p.145.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Willaime, J. P. (2003). *L'enseignement du fait religieux : perspectives européennes*, in *L'enseignement du fait religieux*. Actes du séminaire interdisciplinaire organisé à Paris les 5, 6 et 7 novembre 2002. SCEREN, p.115.

Tunisian schools. Most of secondary course textbooks discuss the religious plurality primarily in the Islamic context between Shiite and Sunni and stress mainly Arabs' reformist thinking, which raise particularly sharp questions. Although reflection is a religious command in Islam, in Tunisia, all matters may be open to question except Islam, which somewhat puts other religions in shadow.

In the last decade, a large section of the population, in particular those who have financial flexibility, have chosen to move their children to private schools to avoid acquaintance with religious fundamentalism that has spread in schools and colleges. The predominant reason for the distancing from public schools is the breeding ground for radicalization and extremist speeches that took shape after the revolution. This situation arose because of the recruitment of teachers, who benefited from amnesty in public school despite their extremist views and affiliation to Salafist movement "*Ansar Sharia*". The trend for private schools is prompted by parents' fear to expose their children to religious propaganda and brainwashing, which explains why they opted to place their children in secular schools to protect them from the grip of religion. Choosing French schools reflects an appreciation for religious neutrality that promotes openness, critical thinking, and provides pupils with cultural code to open to other cultures, religions, and lifestyles. This reflects parents' protective spirit to ensure the integration of their children into an efficient socialization process, a protection from invasive religiosity and not from belief.<sup>556</sup> E. Pontanier believes that if the Tunisian schooling system succeeds to be neutral in terms of ethical behaviour and freedom of conscience, it would represent a key asset to overcoming the ongoing religious heaviness.<sup>557</sup> Pupils should free themselves from all religious obligations and no longer legitimize their atheism or their refusal of an uncompromising and proselytizing Islam.<sup>558</sup>

Jalloul was adamant that, in order to restore restoring confidence in public schools, the ministry should establish a substantial educational and cultural program based on inclusive spirit and balanced focus on religion.<sup>559</sup> He claims that his reform is going to upgrade school manuals in order to tackle ancient and omnipresent religions to boost open-minded visions and overcome the fear of otherness. It is very important to open children's minds and hearts to accept others' diversity and religion's equal dignity at a young age to establish tolerance and foster equity

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<sup>556</sup> Marcel, G. (1998). *La religion dans la démocratie*. Parcours de la cité, Paris, Le Débat Gallimard, p. 13.

<sup>557</sup> Pontanier, É. (2016). *Les élites sociales et le choix de l'enseignement français en Tunisie: entre consumérisme scolaire et socialisation laïque*. L'Année du Maghreb, (14), p. 205-232.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

between Tunisians. Courses on religion should be given in an interactive and informative manner to allow pupils to gain a broad understanding of other religious identities and distinctiveness and thwart the burden of social constraints. That does not mean that schools are going to stop teaching Islam and focus on other religions, on the contrary, these courses can operate in parallel in a complementary manner to provide a better understanding of the religious phenomena.

In her book *Integrative Religious Education in Europe*, Wanda Alberts claims that “it is important not separate religion from its global and local social and political contexts, but to discern its function in social and political processes as a field in which much of the negotiation of power and privilege takes place”.<sup>560</sup> Taking the example of teaching religion in England, W. Alberts stresses the importance of addressing this concern in different approaches as experiential, interpretative, critical, and constructive to show that there is more than one perceived perspective of religion.<sup>561</sup> Tunisian school programs do not consider this point and limits itself to a narrative approach that does not allow much scope for religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Bahaism. On this point, Jalloul suggested to learn from the European model of teaching religion and referred to the French concordat scheme in Alsace-Moselle to improve this process in Tunisian schools.<sup>562</sup>

As for me, I rather think that the Hamburg program “*Religionsunterricht für alle*” might be a better model to follow as part of an interesting perspective of religious teaching. This program takes a ground-breaking approach to religion by offering an interreligious course that gives insight into the beliefs of Alevi, Buddhist, Protestant, and Muslim beliefs and puts great weight on the importance of respect and understanding for religious diversity to advancing human welfare, freedom, and progress. The great quality of the Schulz’ Hamburger model is creating a dialogue not only between teachers and pupils but also with different agents to enhance learners’ skills, critical thinking, and autonomy.<sup>563</sup> In the meanwhile, a single reading of Tunisian textbooks’ content in Islamic education and history is sufficient to establish a disuse of pluralism register and ignorance to Tunisian religious minorities as if they do not exist at all. N. Jalloul stated that he was elected to counter the ongoing religious trend at schools and that his reform aims to free education from religious ideology and to emancipate younger

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<sup>560</sup> Alberts, W. (2012). *Integrative religious education in Europe: A study-of-religions approach* (Vol. 47). Walter de Gruyter. p 388-389

<sup>561</sup> Ibid. p 130-174.

<sup>562</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>563</sup> Schulz, W. (1985). *Die lehrtheoretische Didaktik*, in Gudjons, Herbert & Rainer Winkel(ed.) *Didaktische Theorien*, Hamburg: Bergmann& Helbig, p. 31.

generations in a modern project of multiculturalism.<sup>564</sup> He added that familiarizing children with religious otherness should start at schools and needs to be continued and sustained in museums with school outings and family incentives. I am in complete agreement with the Minister's perspective of making best use of religious collections to create informative encounters between pupils and religious materials to enhance their practical knowledge and inter-faith understanding. The question that still arises is how are museums able to explain at best the Tunisian religious diversity and to familiarize schoolchildren with religious materials unusual for them?

### 3.1. Addressing Religion in Museums

Museums represent great handy resources for comprehensive and workable access to religious knowledge because they give more practical and visual aspects to the information learned at schools. Through scenarios that inform, educate, and raise awareness on religious diversity, museums became in the last decades a precious asset in fostering understanding and appreciation of unfamiliar religious beliefs and improving social acceptance and religious trust. When it comes to exhibiting religious materials, the reactions of visitors are often unforeseeable and range from curiosity and satisfaction to reverence and condemnation.<sup>565</sup> This fact alone may explain the avoidance of tackling living traditions and exhibiting objects of other faiths in Tunisian museums for fear of shocking Muslim sensibilities. Added to this is also the State politics that tries to phase out the superficial, superstitious, or magical understanding of religion, which explains the dodging of spiritual dimension in Tunisian museums. The situation changed much in the last decade when curators introduced intangible aspects of religion into museums and devoted more attention to living and contemporary realities and faiths in Tunisia. Even though the new discourse opens up a new perspective to understand religion, its drawback is that it was confined only to temporary exposures and did not sway permanent exhibitions. However, if the intention of museums is to build collective acceptance and better understanding of religious difference to familiarize children with religion, their focus needs to evolve to cover all aspect of religious phenomena.

Culture, art, and particularly religion are unpalatable topics for children and appear inconsistent with their ages, which requires a specific action plan to mobilize their interest and encourage them opening up to other religions. In real terms, museums should provide engaging, funny, branded, and interactive entertainment to connect children with religious objects through an

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<sup>564</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>565</sup> C. Arthur 2000, p 4.

immersive experience adapted to their frame of mind. J. C. Dana claims that “a good museum attracts, entertains, arouses curiosity, leads to questioning and thus promotes learning”,<sup>566</sup> which means that visitors will show more interest in appealing scenarios than in an arbitrary juxtaposition of artifacts.<sup>567</sup> Tunisian museums have endless potential to provide captivating experiences of religion; however, they are not making the most of their resources to provide greater insight into Tunisia’s religious richness and diversity and to promote greater mutual acquaintance between citizens. Learning is a complex process carried out in different forms and it is not limited only to theoretical academic requirements.<sup>568</sup> Unlike museums, that have playful, informal and promotional purposes charged with entertainment, freedom of choice, and movement, schools are closed spaces that can hamper the receptive capacity of pupils due to their focus on passing grades.<sup>569</sup> Many researchers contrast museum learning and school learning and criticize their complicity despite the fact that museums do not intend to replace schools but rather to broaden the scope of information exchange and help pupils think differently, exchange ideas, and share experiences.<sup>570</sup> Notwithstanding conservation, restoration and displaying are the heart and body of museums, educating, informing, inspiring, confronting, raising awareness, and advocating for social and religious changes are its soul that keep it alive.

In tackling religion, the issue of learning should not be raised with a reductive approach confined to a systematic comparison with school but should rather consider the multidisciplinary perspective of museums required to disseminate cultural and religious knowledge. To improve the quality and settings of learning religion for young people, school-museum partnerships represent a tremendous asset to grasp objects’ meanings and symbolism given the emotional, cognitive, cultural, and social dimensions of both bodies. The museum has a double aspect, “leisure centre” and “resource centre”, able to transform the visit into a trigger of an insightful and reflective experience that facilitates access and understanding of patrimonial and religious complex facts.<sup>571</sup> Graphics, sound effects, animated illustrations, and direct contact with objects help pupils overcome the theoretical framework of lectures and adds tangibility and reality to the classical learning process.<sup>572</sup> The realistic and practical encounter

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<sup>566</sup> Nettleton, L. G., & Heller, K. (October 27, 2005) *Changing Minds: Adolescents, Art and Learning*, In Museums in Education through Art Building Partnerships for Secondary Education, UNESCO expert panel meeting, p. 21.

<sup>567</sup> Goswamy, B. N. (1991) *Another past, another context: exhibition Indian art abroad*, In karp, I., & Lavine, S. D. Exhibiting cultures: Washington DC: Smithsonian institution press, p. 69.

<sup>568</sup> Giordan, A. (1999). *Une didactique pour les sciences expérimentales*. Belin, p. 1-239.

<sup>569</sup> Caillet, É. (1986). *Culture scientifique, technique et industrielle*, Education permanente, Paris, p. 1-36.

<sup>570</sup> Drouguet, & Gob 2014.

<sup>571</sup> Vivet, M. (1991). *L’explication scientifique dans le cadre muséologique*. In M.-G. Séré & A. Weil-Barais (Éds.), Actes du colloque-L’explication dans l’enseignement et l’EIAO, p. 149-155.

<sup>572</sup> Allard, M. (1993). *Le musée comme lieu d’apprentissage*. Vie pédagogique, 84, p. 41-43.

with religious objects increases the cognitive skills of children and appeals their curiosity and experimental groping. Addressing religion through exhibits allows pupils to recognize objects in varied dimensions (emotional, intellectual, physical) and to go through spiritual experiences that trigger a quest for information and boost the didactic transposition of knowledge.

Good exposure should not stimulate one sense but should bring all five senses to an awakening to engage a serene perception of artifacts and drive deep engagement in the storyline of the collection.<sup>573</sup> Audiovisual effects provide an impetus for bringing the visitor's attention to the fundamental key message of exposure because they enhance the experience of wonder, astonishment, and surprise. These true hands-on experiences encourage visitors of all ages to take part of the scenario by pushing buttons, using intuition, and testing their knowledge through an instructional communication process called "*Museum Pedagogy*". This process narrates, explains, and describes different scenes using a recognizable language adapted to non-specialized public in a combination of pictures, sounds, and videos, which increases visibility and therefore understanding. These elements generate an immersive experience very close to the original context of objects, which strengthens the understanding and which adds substantial charm to the visit.<sup>574</sup> Only when all these elements are looked at as a whole is it possible to develop an effective approach to religion that incites visitors to be diligent in interpreting artifacts and understanding their meanings. Even if museums are not typical educational institutions such as schools or colleges, they provide an essential venue for learning and generate constructive criticism, exchange, religious openness, mutual trust, and otherness respect. They provide learning activities almost identical to academic spaces in terms of weaving links with knowledge and similar to social spaces in terms of deepening mutual understanding and respect.<sup>575</sup> The challenge is to know how to make best use of them in public education about the importance of religion as a dimension of diversity within a pluralistic population like Tunisia.

In contrast, Tunisian museums do not clearly highlight the spiritual, imagined, and symbolic value of the religious materials, which are key factors to grasp implicit meanings, ideas, and connections. Moreover, their methods of disseminating information are restricted to visual aspects and do not rely on intellectual exercises and hypothetical conjunctions that test visitors'

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<sup>573</sup> Schuessler, J. (1992). *Audio-visual technology: interpretive aid or roadside attraction?* Museum International, 44(2), p. 88.

<sup>574</sup> Hansen, T. H. (1984). *Le rôle éducatif du musée*. Museum International (Edition Française), 36(4), p. 176-183.

<sup>575</sup> Dufresne-Tassé, C. (1991). *Introduction: L'éducation muséale, son rôle, sa spécificité, sa place parmi les autres fonctions du musée*. Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation, p. 252-256.

implication in learning tasks. Museums should more appropriately address the religious dimensions of objects to reflect their significance, to become more instructive, didactic, innovative, and responsive to social and religious changes, and to strengthen ties between pupils and common religious inheritance. Their design should be more riveting, their interpretation should more comprehensible, and their approaches should be more pluralistic. These changes can develop social and cognitive skills with the pupils and provide a didactic method that rewards classical schooling techniques. Tunisian museums should play a complementary role to schools, characterized by compulsory programs (codified standards), in familiarizing pupils with religious matters. The non-formal learning methodology of museums that gathers leisure and learning facilitates discussions and makes knowledge transfer easier would make religious topics more interesting and insightful for visitors. Exhibiting religion indispensably involves a specific pedagogy to develop visitors' knowledge through mutual interaction and shares experiences requisite for information transmission.<sup>576</sup> This interactive pedagogy is an attractive, striking, and eye-catching process that helps curators draw attention to cultural changes and social transformations and keep boredom at bay.<sup>577</sup>

In the last decade, disseminating knowledge processed from a unidirectional communication style called "*one-way operation*" (museum-visitor) to an interactive communication that put more emphasis on visitor's behaviours and expectations in order to adjust an appropriate message that suited a wider audience. This process has two different forms: face-to-face interaction that takes place during scientific explanation and visit phases, and an indirect interaction that hands teachers additional teaching tools. These two forms are indispensable factors to solicit pupils' critical thinking, cooperative learning, and development of problem-solving skills.<sup>578</sup> Improving content interactivity and introducing visual effects in Tunisian religious collections would flourish pupils' psychological and intellectual skills, familiarize them with other faiths, break with religious taboos and racial exclusivity, and create mindset that respects religious differences and sensitiveness. Religious objects are bearers of common ancestral past and culture, be it Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, and young people should assert each element of their past and collective memory. In real terms, this means that Tunisian

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<sup>576</sup> Allard, M., & Boucher, S. (1998). *Éduquer au musée: un modèle théorique de pédagogie muséale*. Hurtubise HMH, p. 34.

<sup>577</sup> F. Desvales & F. Mairesse 2010, p 32-33.

<sup>578</sup> Guichard, J. (1995). *Nécessité d'une recherche éducative dans les expositions à caractère scientifique et technique*. Culture & Musées, 7(1), p. 102-110.

museums should bring religion out of its role of stigmatization and illustrate that believing in another god or following different traditions is not a reason for rejecting and hating others.

Upgrading the teaching of religion in Tunisian school-museum programs is now a prerequisite, which should put great emphasis on displaying and explaining religious diversity importance and ensuring greater visibility for heterogeneous religious heritage and confessional difference. The core message of their program should repress radical otherness, exclusive view (their/our), and promote a shared identity of "Us". Religion should be reflected as a revealing notion of diversity rather than an identity marker of Islam, and heritage should be explained in a logic of sharing and respect without distinction. This could be accomplished by devoting more attention to minority religions, diversifying content and design (oral testimonies, photography, short-film screenings, and paintwork), and addressing sensitive and timely religious topics. It has proven that not giving sufficient attention to cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding and obscuring religious diversity in Tunisia had undesirable consequences on society. It has promoted ignorance and bred more fear, more mistrust from other religions, and led to intolerance and exclusion.

Tunisia should devise concrete tools to respond to these social and religious crises and create a museum of religion for voices that can help reduce tensions and root values of freedom of conscience. Such museum is able on one hand to bring religion out of its exclusive aspect and overcome prejudices and xenophobia, and convey religious ideas, tradition, and beliefs of a more spiritual dimension on the other. Objects can provide different meaning when compiled with different materials, namely because their contextual placing change automatically their significance.<sup>579</sup> That is to say that museum can reflect a direct or indirect experience with object in its virtual or real production, which allows curators to express an idea, elaborate a concept, or produce a partial fact's reality. This process not only crosses disciplinary lines, but also transcends the borders of museum and replicates object's original context by using a three-pronged approach based on understanding, criticism, and enlightenment of values and practices. This key factor allows a museum of religion to contribute to humankind enrichment by encouraging tolerance, respect, dialogue, and cooperation among religious communities. It is important to stress that some educative programs such as *"Discover Tunisia with Safir"* made an irreversible commitment to familiarize pupils with the richness of religious diversity in Tunisia. This initiative published a collection of books in three languages (Arabic, French, and English) to assist children in understanding their heritage in schools and museums. *"Discover*

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<sup>579</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1991). *Museum and gallery education*. Leicester University Press, p. 100.

*Tunisia with Safir*" is an educative and awareness-raising program that affords pupils with opportunities to recognize important concepts of their history through informative lectures and museums visits. This program is the result of concrete cooperation between museums and schools to give pupils a closer acquaintance with other cultures and foster inter-religious understanding. What steps has Tunisia taken to facilitate the educational actions in museums and to foster better understanding of religious heritage?

### 3.2. The Educative Action in Tunisian Museums

It is important to stress that "*Learning in a museum is a social process that is in part a consequence of the historical experiences of individuals and in part a consequence of the interactions with artifacts and curatorial expressions as the two connect or even collide with each other*".<sup>580</sup> That is to say that museums have a crucial role to play in acting for the common good in society, achieving a better understanding of religion, interpreting humankind issues, and encouraging visitors to build up a particularly close affinity with culture. This process is achieved through a range of activities aimed at youth to provide them with multi-layered and complex experiences charged with interaction and conversation in a voluntary and dialogic way.<sup>581</sup> In the last decades of the 20th century, schools began to seek out new paths to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their educative offer in order to give practical insights to theory courses and engage pupils in a constant process of reflection.<sup>582</sup>

From 2004 onward, Tunisia has engaged on this path with a clear aim of promoting and popularizing culture through a coeducation process conducted in museums and schools. This strategy has as its aim to stimulate the interest of schoolchildren for museums, culture, heritage, and respect for differences. It would have been necessary to wait until the revolution to get out of the political pressure and place more emphasis on the religious component in schools and museum activities. However, given the findings of my survey (Chapter 3.2.1), the strategy of familiarizing pupils with cultures was not highly successful since school-goers still attend museums rarely, which requires reaction from curators to stay in the game.

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<sup>580</sup> Leinhardt, G., & Knutson, K. (2004). *Listening in on museum conversations*. Rowman Altamira, p. 49.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid, p. 144-145.

<sup>582</sup> Biais, J. M. (1991). *Les adolescents, les musées et l'approche inductive*. In Société des musées québécois (ed.), Actes du colloque « À propos des recherches didactiques au musée », p. 83-87.

### 3.2.1. “Discover Tunisia with Safir”: A Particular Educational Standpoint for Culture and Religion

The educative program “*Safir*” aims to popularize Culture, Art, Heritage, and History of Religion using interactive and interpretive content to help broach religious, cultural, and historical topics in playful and educational ways. As a start, “*Safir*” covered 15 schools in Tunis between the northwest and central west and mentored 600 pupils who undertook interactive visits in three museums (Bardo, Dougga, and El Jem). The goal of the program is to bring pupils to a high level of recognition their collective heritage by using appropriate pedagogical materials for museums and schools. This additional program for the fifth year of basic education starts with reading; interactive and tailored sessions in history and geography classes by using historic characters to help pupils to remember relevant information. As a first step, pupils work together in groups, write down their questions in advance, share their findings, remarks, and draw conclusions before visiting the collections. They use books such as *The Mystery of Bardo Mosaics* to acquire reading keys of history of religious life throughout the centuries by using narrative denouement situations to stimulate curiosity and raise awareness about Tunisia’s tremendous archaeological, cultural, and religious wealth. As a second step, pupils explore the collections to experience an informative guided tour through the museums. These visits engage pupils in a story-building exercise and lead through observation, inquiry, engagement, and hands-on work to a sense of “ownership”. These interactive tours encapsulate the best of group experiences, provide the stimulus for critical thinking and dialog, and develop a sense of familiarity and comfort with other cultures and religion. The practical hands-on experiences empower pupils to observe, decode, query, and form opinions about the religious value, historical circumstance, and aesthetic trademark of objects and link them with school courses.

“*Safir*” gives an important place for religious understanding and storing awareness and emotions in the memory of pupils. It sheds light on religious connections in art, shared past, and similar experiences between communities through recognizing books’ characters in Jewish and early Christian mosaics. In the Bardo Museum, pupils are acquainted with several mosaics of great religious and biblical inspiration such as Daniel's<sup>583</sup> in the lion's den that interprets chapter 6, verses 12 to 26 of the book of Daniel. This mosaic is an outstanding example of a method used to familiarize pupils with biblical themes by using artifacts of great moral and spiritual value to reflect the difficulties and persecutions of the Christians of the first centuries.

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<sup>583</sup> After Ezekiel, Daniel represents for Jews and Christians a prophet according to the holy writings of the Catholic Church.



Figure 6 Mosaic of Daniel in the Lions' Den from Borj el Youdi (Bardo Museum) and the Dedication of the prayer hall of the Naro synagogue, <http://www.aiema-namerica.org> / <https://irht.hypotheses.org/2778>, retrieved on 23.08.2018.

As shown in the picture above, other mosaics in Bardo allow pupils to be aware of Jewish symbolic peculiarities (seven-branch candelabrum, ram's horn, palm and citron) exhibited in vernacular and funerary inscriptions and discover the eschatological dimensions of Jewish religious ornaments and local distinctive peculiarities. In the Islamic department, pupils discover precious calligraphical signs of Islam exhibited in works of art, jewellery, numismatic coins, and leaflets of the Koran. Integrating religious experiences in schools' visits is an effective comprehensive strategy to familiarize pupils in elementary and secondary schools with other beliefs and to facilitate the understanding of others and cohabitation in Tunisia. This early encounter with collective heritage will develop pupils' cognitive level, mental flexibility, and instill their receptivity and sense of relativity, which nourishes acceptance, openness, and tolerance. This point is particularly relevant to substantiate the necessity of creating a museum of religion in Tunisia to learn to accept difference, tolerance, diversity, living together, civic responsibility, and overcoming unconscious religious antipathies at a young age. Visitors rely mainly on their prior experience and knowledge to interpret significance, unravel meanings, and understand key messages of collections.<sup>584</sup> Children have a very particular relationship to objects, exhibits, new experiences, and learning in general because their receptivity differs from those of adults.<sup>585</sup> In front of unfamiliar objects, children observe, compare, raise questions, and show spontaneous reactions, but also seek attention-drawing actions, suspense, and astonishment. For this reason, museums working with the program "Safir" avoid providing

<sup>584</sup> Natali, J. P., & Martinand, J. L. (1987). *Une exposition scientifique thématique... est-ce bien concevable?* in La formation scientifique des adultes. Éducation permanente, (90), p.115-129.

<sup>585</sup> Girardet, S., Merleau-Ponty, C., & Rosado, F. P. (1994). *Portes ouvertes: les enfants: accueillir les enfants dans un musée ou une exposition.* Musée en Herbe-OCIM, p. 1-32.

pupils with finished speeches and focus on activating their prior knowledge and engaging them in practical activities to enhance their reflection and critical thinking and keep boredom at bay. In real terms, mediators put children in creative situations (games, riddles, workshops) to help them develop their ideas on cultural and religious topics and balance the social, cultural, and recreational objectives set up by the program. These situations enrich the audience's knowledge in a didactic way and raise awareness around issues of religious diversity in an entertaining, culturally sensitive, and accessible way. More specifically, the curators spearhead the standing and implementation of outreach education, and the educators conduct the awareness-raising-didactic activities and child-sensitive counselling. In religious collections, there are four critical types of transactions: “*didactic*”, “*cognitive*”, “*iconographic*”, and “*credal*” that allow religious artifacts to speak in different ways.<sup>586</sup> These transactions draw on a two-way relationship: interaction with mediators and interactivity with objects, which implies the use of popularized information, plain language, and adapted communication tools to structure knowledge and facilitate its understanding.<sup>587</sup> Informal knowledge is not deficient, it only takes border dimensions, but still keeps its scientific or didactic aspect.<sup>588</sup> This didactic facet transforms objects of religious nature (for example baptistery, religious sundial, mosaic, protective amulet, and statuette) into museographic and technical objects that improve visitors’ understanding of disseminated knowledge.

C. Paine claims that in each encounter between visitor and object, an interaction and “*relationality*” takes shape in which the curators take the role of a moderator, particularly when it comes to religious objects.<sup>589</sup> Similarly, R. A. Lenga, educative director of the Jewish museum in London, stresses the importance of moving from a focus on descriptive aspect of facts (faiths) to one of encounter, communicativeness, interactiveness, conviviality, and an exchange of ideas.<sup>590</sup> These encounters are not supposed to shock or trample over religious sensitivities but rather to promote acceptance of the values/customs of other faiths and maintains that all religions are open to criticism and public scrutiny. Unfamiliar beliefs, cultures, and ways of thinking should be seen in a positive light, because this unawareness is a source of amazement and a key element requisite for learning.<sup>591</sup> C. Payne claims that “*Museums have the responsibility, if they are to interpret their objects to visitors-to both their affect and their*

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<sup>586</sup> Howes, G. (2006). *The art of the sacred: an introduction to the aesthetics of art and belief*. Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 6-25.

<sup>587</sup> Guichard & Martinand 2000, p. 11-12

<sup>588</sup> Schiele, B., & Larocque, G. (1981). *Le message vulgarisateur*. Communications, 33 (1), p. 165-183.

<sup>589</sup> Paine 2013, p. 7.

<sup>590</sup> Lenga, R. A., & Derry, J. (1995). *Teaching as a Chain of Tradition*. World Religions in Education, p. 81-4.

<sup>591</sup> Ivainer, T., & Lenglet, R. (1996). *Les ignorances des savants*. Maisonneuve & Larose, p. 1-193.

*understanding*”,<sup>592</sup> however, each visitor develops his own relationship to objects, a relationship that is neither that of the mediator, nor that of the curator, nor that of the visitor nearby. Accordingly, it is advisable to create a congenial atmosphere called “*Magical Contagion*”<sup>593</sup> and use a cutting-edge design to impress, attract, hold visitors’ interest and help them understand the big ideas of the collection.

Exhibitions on religion should not be limited to an informative aim, but should rather spread awareness, amaze, and induce doubt to remain engraved in their memory. Such experiences as astonishment, surprise, and doubt have enabled the Saint Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow to receive the award for the best museum in Britain.<sup>594</sup> Exhibitions are powerful tools to familiarize young audiences with basic notions and concepts of religion and mobilize knowledge, skills, and capacities to understand diversity issues and be respectful of differences. The European Union's ambassador to Tunisia Patrice Bergamini stressed the importance of informative, engaging, educational, and awareness-raising programs such as “*Safir*” in Tunisian society to foster otherness acceptance and reject ethnic and religious discrimination by encouraging young people to open up to different cultures and religion and ensure a better future for the community.<sup>595</sup> Schools in Sousse, Monastir, and Mahdia will participate in the program “*Discover Tunisia with Safir*”, which is a good sign that reflects the program’s success and effectiveness in familiarizing pupils with museums, culture, and religions. It is important to stress that other museums such as Sousse Archaeological Museum play an important role in inspiring schoolchildren with hands-on cultural experiments and in familiarizing them with religious characteristics of other faiths. What sets this museum apart is that it provides long-term programs to strengthen awareness raising and education for religious diversity, acceptance, and tolerance.

### **3.2.2. Educative and Awareness-Raising Programs in the Sousse Archaeological Museum**

Over the last decade, the Sousse Museum took on the responsibility of assisting schoolchildren in their school curricula and offering them field trips, guided tours and hands-on activities to become acquainted with unfamiliar artifacts and experience other cultures and religions in a

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<sup>592</sup> Paine 2013, p. 8.

<sup>593</sup> Evans, E. M., Mull, M. S., & Poling, D. A. (2002). *The authentic object? A child’s-eye view*. Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums, p. 73.

<sup>594</sup> Michel, P. (1999). *La religion au musée*. Croire dans l’Europe contemporaine. Paris: L’Harmattan, p. 150-172.

<sup>595</sup> Le Temps (25.02.2018) *Bruit et chuchotements*. Retrieved on 12.06.2018 from [www.letemps.com.tn/article/107005/bruits-et-chuchotements](http://www.letemps.com.tn/article/107005/bruits-et-chuchotements)

simulated setting. Its partnership covered twelve schools in three major cities (Sousse, Monastir, and Mahdiya), and organized twice a month field trips and activities related to history, culture, and religion courses. In 2015, only six classes (92 students) benefited from these educative and awareness-raising programs but one year after, the attendance has significantly increased and reach 18 classes (434 students).<sup>596</sup> The salient points of this program are its playful approach and teaching method used in conjunction with museum resources (short texts, small school films, interactive games) to arouse maximum interest in cultural and religious heritage as a vehicle for sustainable social development and strengthening the national identity. The educative program of the Sousse Museum is comprehensive and balanced on three successive phases of similar importance: pre-visit preparation activities, activities during the visit, and post-visit synthesis in the form of debriefing activities in classroom extension. These extra-visit and hands-on activities make children more receptive to other forms of knowledge, notably scientific knowledge, and maximizes the spin-offs from cultural activities. The three steps of the Sousse Museum program are as below:

**Before the visit:** Museum educators send out brochures and catalogues of the exhibitions (permanent/temporary) a few days before the visit to give a flavour of the collection and draw pupils' attention to unfamiliar topics such as Punic and Roman culture, ancient deities, early Judaism, and Christianity. This step is an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual preparation for schoolchildren to get a sense of what exhibitions and objects may look like. Teachers are in charge of the mental training that consists of helping their pupils in gathering data, hypothesizing, and identifying questions by using their prior knowledge. Subsequently, pupils continue their research and investigations at home to acquire further information on the subject matters.

**During the visit:** This overriding task is ensured by specific educators specialized in informal education and cultural diversity. The educators divide pupils into teams of three or four, give them a list of questions related to displayed objects, and provide them with the time to find answers. This mechanism of disseminating knowledge called "*focused learning activities*" is widely applied in museums working closely with schools and colleges because it develops team spirit, dynamics, critical thinking, and makes understanding easier.<sup>597</sup> The Sousse Museum devotes one educator for eight pupils who are in charge of reducing difficulties, facilitating the

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<sup>596</sup> Baccouche, F. (2016) *L'éducation muséale au musée de Sousse*, A propos d'une activité orientée vers la lecture tentée auprès de classe de cinquième et de sixième année. Retrieved on 03.08.2017. from [http://www.inp.rnrt.tn/musee/rapport\\_education\\_musee\\_sousse.pdf](http://www.inp.rnrt.tn/musee/rapport_education_musee_sousse.pdf),

<sup>597</sup> Sabar, N., & Shamir, I. (1988) *Focused learning at Beth Natefusoth*. Curator, 31(4), p. 276-292.

reading of artifacts, demonstrating the clues to decode objects, and supporting pupils in case of failure. In addition, the museum allows volunteering parents to have access free of charge to the collection during the day of the visit to assist pupils and to lend a hand wherever necessary. The educative activities conducted during the visit take into consideration the age and mental capacity of children who get bored easily, and make use of “*participatory tours*”<sup>598</sup> to keep pupils constantly attentive to the discussant. These tours rely on induction activities such as riddles, quizzes, observations and role-playing games to motivate pupils to get more involved in the visit and to feel comfortable in asking questions. These activities promote direct contact and exchanges between pupils and educators, make the communication lines much more fluid, and open up new ways for fearful pupils to express their opinions.<sup>599</sup> The educators place pupils in challenging situations to see, compare, evaluate, and reflect on works of religious nature such as baptistry and the Christian cross and relate them to school courses.

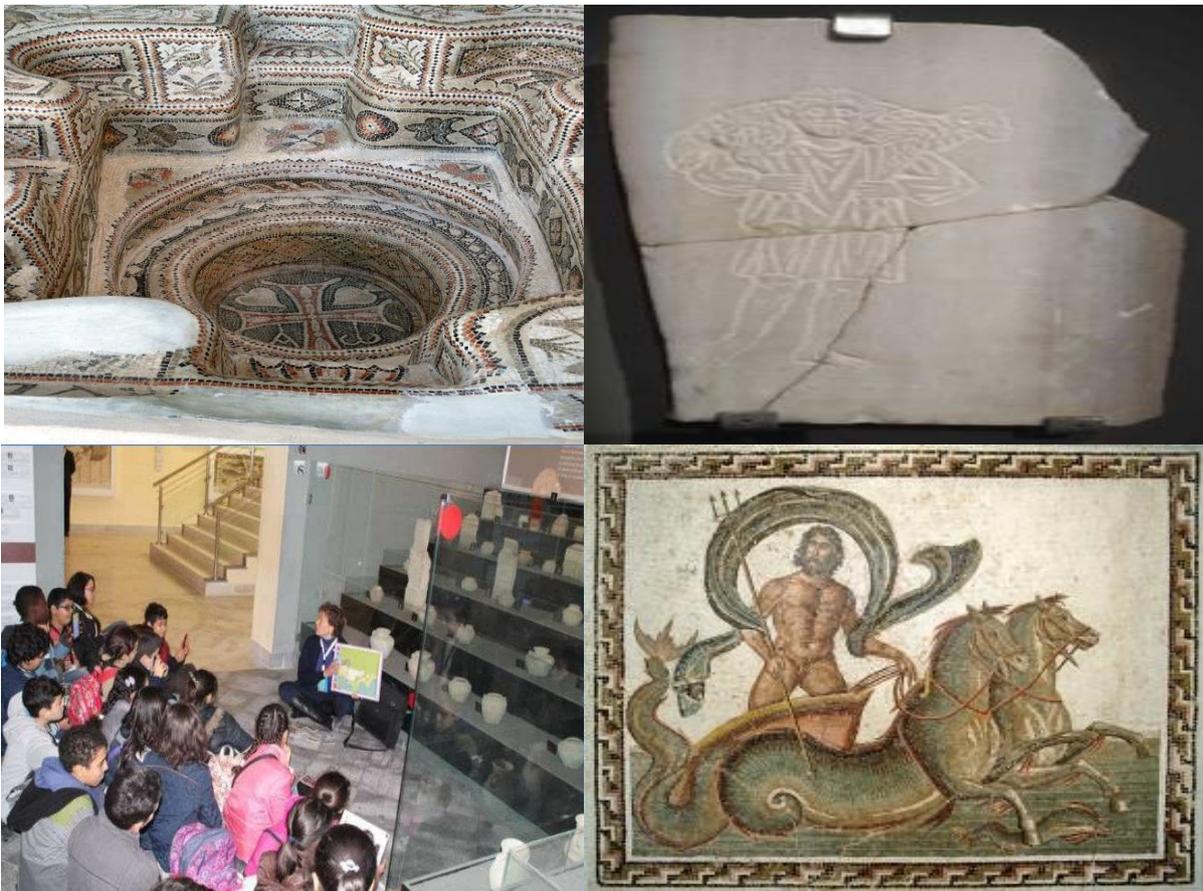


Figure 7 Religious materials used in the focused learning activities, <http://www.soussemuseum.tn>, retrieved on 12.02.2019.

<sup>598</sup> Participatory tours are interactive activities that implies schoolchildren participation in quest for information to stay focused on the tour progress Housen, A. (1980). *What is beyond of before, the lecture tour?* A study of aesthetic modes of understanding. *Art Education*, 33(1), p. 16-18.

<sup>599</sup> Biaisi 1991, p. 83-87.

The visit offers a range of hands-on and minds-on activities on culture, religion, and tradition to help pupils think contextually about their society, focus on the historical and social contexts of objects, and make connections with their heritage. Pupils should describe, compare, interpret, and even contrast religious particularities of each historical period and analyse symbolism of religious artwork using an aesthetics and religious-related vocabulary. Considering the richness of the collection, the educative and awareness-raising program of the Sousse Museum provides pupils with a detailed insight into ancient religious and cultural life and all aspects of liturgy and Christian worship.

The understanding of certain religious notions is difficult for youthful public, which implies educators' assistance to help pupils read labels, find visual cues to interpret objects, choose itineraries, and properly share their time. This assistance, called in museum education "*tutorship interaction*", becomes then a relevant psychological and spiritual counsel to develop a better understanding of museological concepts and religious significance. Despite technological advancements in museum settings, human mediation remains paramount in transmitting knowledge, problem solving, and ensuring effective communication of pertinent information.<sup>600</sup> Adult guidance and supervision are highly recommended to interact with children and provide them with intellectual and emotional assistance if they do not understand what some notions mean.<sup>601</sup> Pupils might just have fun for a brief moment and regularly lose attention, which implies educators interfering to restore quickly their mental alertness through active tasks and guessing games.<sup>602</sup> In the Sousse Museum, pupils become the main players of the visit and participate actively in providing knowledge through a psycho-cognitive method called "*principle of emergentist adhesion*". The theatrical method helps pupils map out information to improve their memorization and creativity by playing scenes and religious celebrations inspired from Roman mosaics and Greek mythology. Pupils play scenarios, put themselves in the skin of religious leaders, imitate voices, and use an appropriate vocabulary to fit the ancient worn costumes. At the end of the visit, they benefit from free time to decompress, take a walk, admire contents, reflect, compare, and establish their own theories because pupils

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<sup>600</sup> Vygotski, L. (1997) *Pensée et langage*. Paris : La Dispute, p. 350-351.

<sup>601</sup> Bruner, J. (1983) *Le développement de l'enfant*. Savoir-faire, savoir dire. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, p. 275-277

<sup>602</sup> Bernard, F. X., Weil-Barais, A., & Caillot, M. (2007) *Les jeunes enfants peuvent-ils acquérir des connaissances sur le monde physique en utilisant un simulateur ?* ASTER, 43, p 17-34.

in fifth or sixth grade are intellectually at “*formal operations’ level*” and need a moment of intimate relaxation and deductive and inductive reasoning.<sup>603</sup>

**After the visit:** there are extension activities conducted in assessment session to develop pupils’ self-esteem, awareness of heritage, and boost action-oriented learning. In these sessions, pupils sort and assess the information learned at the museum, draw conclusions, and provide recommendations. Afterward, they are requested to conceive designs, texts, pictures, and graphic elements related to the visit and organize their own exposure at school to encourage their schoolmates to visit museums. Such experiential, practical, and reflective activities are of crucial importance in the learning process because they engage pupils in story-building exercises that remain etched in their memories.

These educative and awareness-raising programs conducted in museums encourage youthful public to question received models, query religious conviction, and shape their own conception of identity and memory. There is always something new for the young public to learn in museums because “*Any particular program is appropriate for this age group*”.<sup>604</sup> Museums can forge religious identity and strengthen religious tolerance when they set this social aim as one of the objectives. The Jerusalem Diaspora Museum remains a good example for museum influence in a socio-political context because it fosters “*The feeling of identity and affinity of its Jewish visitors to their historical background*”.<sup>605</sup> Tunisian museums should take more responsibility in promoting dialogue, shedding rigid identities, forging national unity amid ethnic and religious diversity, educating, and raising awareness among young people about the importance of their heritage. N. Jalloul claims that even if Tunisia is on the right path, there is still a long way to go to reach the Western museological, educational, and pedagogical effectiveness in terms of addressing religion.<sup>606</sup> Tunisia needs to invest more to familiarize young people with museums, shed rigid identities, foster openness and flexibility toward ethical and religious differences, and alleviate religious tension in society. This requires a comprehensive review for museums’ strategies and approaches to religious matters and an educational reform to put more weight on religious diversity. What does the minister plan in his reform “*The White book*” to address these issues?

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<sup>603</sup> This period start with 11-12 years and up to 16 years in which adolescents begin to feel the need to establish hypotheses. Piaget, J. (1952) *Essai sur les transformations des opérations logiques: les 256 opérations ternaires de la logique bivalente des propositions*, Paris, PUF, p. 11-239.

<sup>604</sup> Andrews, K., & Asia, C. (1979). *Teenagers' attitudes about art museums*. Curator: The Museum Journal, 22 (3), p. 228.

<sup>605</sup> Sabar & Shamir 1988, p. 277.

<sup>606</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

### 3.3. The “White Book”: A critical Step Toward Better Addressing Religion

Education is a profound investment in people and in the future of a country to produce a human capital required for employment and productivity but above all for social integration and equilibrium. Reinforcing public education is the biggest initiative undertaken around the world to ensure social harmony and promote tolerance and understanding among all nations, ethnicities, and religious groups.<sup>607</sup> Educated persons interact positively with other cultures, beliefs, and ways of thinking, which encourages societal participation and acceptance of difference. Tunisia is one of the countries that attaches great importance to education and allocates an extremely large share of its budgetary resources to primary and secondary education. Tunisia reformed twice its education system in 1991 and 2002 to improve its qualitative and quantitative performance and boost its industry, but without attributing much importance for improving approaches and working methods of addressing religion at schools and colleges. This “*Semi-education/ Halbbildung*” that focus on stepping up industrialization without putting great emphasis on educating individuals politically, socially, and ethically will trigger sooner or later a social decline.<sup>608</sup> The Tunisian decline grew with its post-revolutionary situation that strengthened tensions, political and religious intolerance, and despotism because of a lack of awareness and understanding among people.

N. Jelloul claims that due to the sectarian tension and violence that have evolved after the revolution, a syllabus had become inevitable to upgrade school subjects dealing with religion, broaden their content, and add critical consciousness to ensure a better understanding of other faiths.<sup>609</sup> He added that such syllabus should be critical, dynamic, interactive, and cooperate with actors of other religious communities to promote a culture of inclusiveness, receptiveness, and tolerance. In today's modern society, there is a growing need to smartly address religion and build collective understanding among children about the value of religion by engaging them in critical thinking and a quest for truth.<sup>610</sup> This need has arisen in Tunisia to move from a focus on “*Islamic instruction*” to an education about world religion and to place more emphasis on the ethical, social, and experiential dimension of religion. Teaching religions should not be religious itself or assigned to a particular faith to be able to gather religious and non-religious

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<sup>607</sup> Baker, D., & LeTendre, G. K. (2005). *National differences, global similarities: World culture and the future of schooling*. Stanford University Press, p. 200-216.

<sup>608</sup> The concept of semi-education took shape in the pedagogical reform of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20 century. Bernhard, A., Rothermel, L., & Rühle, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbuch kritische Pädagogik: eine Einführung in die Erziehungs-und Bildungswissenschaft*. Beltz, p. 62-74

<sup>609</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>610</sup> Smart, N. (1968). *Secular education and the logic of religion*, Faber & Faber, p. 96-97.

people without discrimination. It should be thematic to compare topics from different religions to help pupils learn about others' faith and spiritual experiences. The compulsory religious education on Islam is not enough to educate people about religious diversity and build a cohesive society and democratic stability. Teaching religion should be objective, unbiased, and in a pluralistic manner through courses of history of religion and comparative religions to promote the freedoms of conscience and opinion and give insight into the variety of human responses to life experiences. It should be recalled, in this respect, that such upgrades should be progressive, broad, and complementary between different cultural agencies such as youth centres and museums.

In "*The White book*", N. Jalloul plans to upgrade the contents of schoolbooks, decrease subjects' number and days of study to 190, devote Wednesdays and Friday afternoon to cultural and artistic activities such as visiting museums, playing music, painting, and sculpting in cultural clubs.<sup>611</sup> Its goal is rethinking schools' strategies and its involvement with museums and cultural centres for the purpose of engaging pupils in hands-on and minds-on activities and promoting better understanding of the country's diverse history, culture, and religious traditions. These activities conducted in museums will boost confidence, respect, and understanding for differences and generate pupils' interest in Tunisian shared heritage and history. To this end, as a first wave, the minister of education provided schools in Tunis, Ariana, and Manouba with 25 buses to increase field trips and facilitate pupils' access to museums. Moreover, he launched cooperation projects with the Italian Cultural Centre and the University of Milan to exchange skills, expertise, and best practices in the area of engaging the public in museums and religious art. In this framework, the minister plans his reform as follows:

Reform Strategic Goals	Procedure	Estimated cost
1- Achieving the principle of equity and equality of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Universal quality preschool education</li> <li>➤ Guarantee an integrative learning environment for special needs pupils</li> </ul>	175 MD
2-Reviewing the school map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review restrictive zoning</li> <li>➤ Prospect a new zoning scheme for educational institutions</li> </ul>	320 MD
3-Developing the competencies of human resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers and training qualifications</li> <li>➤ Human resources professional developing</li> </ul>	430 MD

<sup>611</sup> *The educational reform in Tunisia « The white book »* (May 2016) Ministry of education, national pedagogic center, p 8-50.

4-Developing learners' prerequisites and honing their competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Upgrade language teaching quality to international standards</li> <li>➤ Upgrade programs (religion), curricula, and teaching aid</li> </ul>	650 MD
5-Promoting school life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Revisal of school time promoting the work of NGOs in school</li> </ul>	440 MD
6-Restructuring preparatory and secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reconsider the streaming system</li> <li>➤ Promote student career orientation</li> </ul>	650 MD
7-Addressing the problem of school failure and school dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide special care for low achievers</li> <li>➤ Reintegrate dropouts in mainstream education and training systems</li> </ul>	70 MD
8-Developing information and communication technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Promote blending learning</li> <li>➤ Promote ICT in management and governance</li> </ul>	950 MD
9-Implanting the principle of wise governance in the educational system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Rehabilitate education management at the school level</li> <li>➤ Develop roles and responsibilities at the regional level</li> </ul>	420 MD
<b>Total</b>		4105 MD

Table 3. The Strategic goals and estimated costs of the educational reform. The white book, Ministry of education

In analysing the strategic goals of the planned reform, there is an intention to upgrade the bottom-up of the educative system with focus on rethinking the communication strategies of preparatory and secondary schools (1300 MD), which reflects real political determination to change attitudes and practices toward other cultures and religions at a young age. In the same vein, N. Jalloul claimed that the State is determined to promote intercultural dialogue, emphasize religious diversity, and encourage the sharing of a common heritage in public arenas to promote openness and break through this fear of religion through engagement and seduction activities.<sup>612</sup> He added that the solution put forward is to move to an integrative religious education by launching a “*multi-faith*” syllabus to teach younger generations to have respect and insight into different religions.<sup>613</sup> Raising the quality of education, breaking with unique understandings, talking about difference, erasing hatred for others, and raising awareness among pupils are the main objectives and priority areas of action of “*The white book*”. In its preface, the minister of education stated that “*The achievement and embodiment of the current reform goals and aspirations rest upon the adherence and commitment of all Tunisian men and women in the national endeavor for a school that guarantees Tunisia stability, progress impalpability and dignity for all Tunisian*”.<sup>614</sup>

<sup>612</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid

<sup>614</sup> Ministry of education 2016, p. 8.

Understanding and evaluating world religious beliefs and practices can help pupils make assumptions, compare presumption to reality, and understand significance, function, and symbolism, and, more importantly, question the validity of these beliefs. Stimulating interest in multidimensional models of religion and inculcating tolerance and acceptance among pupils through comprehensive and justified criticism can bring Tunisians together, encourage societal integration, and strengthen recompilation. This process requires an upgrade in the scope and intensity of cooperation between schools and museums to develop young pupils' understanding of beliefs and tradition and promotes their awareness of the spiritual dimension of life experiences. Museums and schools should review their working methods to improve their efficiency and effectiveness and adapt flexibly to permanent cultural and technological changes.

### 3.3.1. School and Museum: Cooperation for Improving Learning and Discovery

Museums and schools are the most effective player in disseminating information and knowledge for young persons, which require a permanent refinement of their working methods to achieve better complementarity and strengthen their educative messages. Since their emergence, one of the most important missions of museums has been to get closer to schools and integrate their curriculum.<sup>615</sup> Tunisian museums should assume more responsibility toward educating, inspiring, advocating, and raising awareness among youthful audiences by offering innovative pedagogical programs that best suit the young public. Likewise, curators should conceive appropriate pedagogical itineraries and make use of interactive scenography to stimulate interest for learning, creative self-expression, and thinking skills to allow them to have a better understanding of their relationship with other practices and ways of thinking. Lastly, but most importantly, educators should provide schools with additional learning material to facilitate the visit's pre/post activities and intellectually to mentally and emotionally prepare pupils for new experiences.<sup>616</sup> The material support consists of loans of "*non-authentic materials*" such as maps, archaeological cut-out models, graphics, models used to conduct vibrant, lively, and interactive activities to facilitate understanding the meaning and symbolism of some artifacts. Reproductions, imitations, and photographs of collections are crucial component to enhance lessons of history, art, and religion by helping teachers to produce

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<sup>615</sup> Celeste, M. (1975). *Une rencontre à Rome sur la didactique des musées*. Museum International 27 (3), p. 148.

<sup>616</sup> Van der Stigchel, J. (1953). *Programmes éducatifs et démonstrations pratiques*. Museum International, 6 (4), 246-250.

practical and hands-on lessons and stimulate pupils' curiosity and interest in the subject matter.<sup>617</sup>

In Tunisia, such educative support is uncommon, not to say non-existent, because museums do not place enough emphasis on providing reproductions, scale models, and imitations for educational purposes. Very few are museums that collaborate with schools in terms of implementing educative support projects to cultivate positive attitudes among young people about other cultures and religion. The exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" represented a perfect opportunity to give pupils an insight into different religious beliefs and practices and show them how humans' lives are affected by religion and help them reflect on meaning. Nonetheless, Tunisian schools missed the boat on this issue and organized very few excursions to introduce pupils to a multi-faith heritage and discover unfamiliar celebrations, lifestyles and expressions of beliefs. In this regard, N. Jalloul claimed that one major objective of the "*White book*" is to enhance the cooperation with museums and create educative programs to develop pupils' reflection and responses to question related to sciences, arts, cultures and religions.<sup>618</sup> He added that from this time forward, museums should collaborate with the ministry of education years in advance to ensure that their exhibits fit within the coming school curriculum.<sup>619</sup> That needs to start with bringing teachers into closer touch with museums, working in meaningful partnerships with educators, combining educational curricula with collection topics, and providing easier access to exhibits. These steps will help familiarize pupils with museums, entrench the values of understanding and tolerance among children, and create empathy with other cultures and faiths.

Schools, museums, and cultural centres should play a key role in fostering the ethical, spiritual, cultural, and social development of pupils and help them interpret, reflect, analyse and draw up a synthesis. Tunisia has a large gap to bridge to achieve Western investment in terms of educating and awareness raising in schools and museums. It is startling to know that the State devotes from its budget nearly 3 dollars a day for every pupil against 13 dollars for every prisoner.<sup>620</sup> Meanwhile, American museums spend yearly more than two billion dollars on education to perform their educational programs, receive yearly more than 55 million visits from students and school groups, and provide yearly more than 18 million instructional hours

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<sup>617</sup> Guichard, F. (1995). *Les musées écoles le partenariat école-muséum*. Actes du symposium international sur les nouveaux espaces de communication de la science et de la technologie, CLIC, Montréal, p. 1-228.

<sup>618</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Cout du prisonnier et de l'élève en Maghreb arabe. <https://www.maghrebvoices.com/p/dfgbnh490.html> retrieved 03.08.2018

for educational activities.<sup>621</sup> Museums on religion in Canada, Scotland, Sweden, England, Germany, and France have taken the lead in facilitating pupils' encounters with religious objects, providing a key stage for understanding world religions, and building positive attitudes toward other religions and cultures.

Although Tunisia succeeded in its transition to democracy, still more effort should be put into building a pluralist society open to difference. Through religious conciliation, a museum of religion is one of the high-impact solutions to promote rapprochement, acceptance, recognition, and understanding among people. Such museums are able to build a positive attitude toward others and inform people about the right of holding different beliefs and even changing them. It would give visitors a new way of reading, interpreting, and understanding objects, ideas, and expression in a spiritual and religious dimension that goes beyond the artistic, historic, or archaeological standpoints. Religious objects embrace often spiritual, symbolic, social, and "sacred" meanings and refer mainly to myths, divinities, ancestors, and "sacred" peoples and places. Henceforth, a question arises: do religious objects retain their sacredness in museum or does the sanctity fall away within museum walls?

#### **4. The Challenge of Displaying Religious Material Within Museums**

Museums are valuable instruments for preserving religious customs, rekindling confessional traditions, and reconstructing religious identities, which implies from curators to place a great deal of importance on showing materials' spiritual and devotional dimension and prevent offending their sacred value.<sup>622</sup> Notwithstanding their core function of preserving material and tangible assets, museums dealing with religious and sensitive materials should place a special focus on presenting objects in all their dimensions. Museums housing religious materials deal with "*symbolologies and ritual manifestations of devotion*" under two different grades, directly by displaying worship objects or indirectly by exhibiting objects recovered from burials. In both cases, the problem of sacredness persists due to the shift of objects' significance and interpretation that varies according to the museum's nature, discourse, and audience. This issue of growing concern complicates the task of curators in terms of choosing artifacts, topics, and keywords, juxtaposing objects, building core messages, and selecting discourses. In religious collections, curators play an important role in bringing artifacts forward, interpreting

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<sup>621</sup> E. Merritt (2014) *Setting the Stage*, in Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem, American Alliance of Museums, p. 9.

<sup>622</sup> Clavir, M., Johnson, E., & Shane, A. (1987). *A discussion on the use of museum artifacts by their original owners*. In Symposium 86. The care and preservation of ethnological materials: proceedings= L'entretien et la sauvegarde des matériaux ethnologiques, p. 27-31.

significance, reaching visitors, and directing their attention, which pushed some scholars to compare them with priests and theologians.<sup>623</sup> C. Payne claims: “*Curators retain control over the way religion appears in museums because they retain the power of choice. Objects are inevitably the slaves of their curators, who choose which one to acquire, whether to display them or put them in a store, and how to display them*”.<sup>624</sup> Nonetheless, considering they are the only key players involved in the concerns of sanctity; approach-shaping and interpretation discrepancy remains very narrow. This process requires a dynamic of interdisciplinary exchange to select the objects to display, discourse to convey, approach to adopt, and message to deliver. Sciences of religion, history, philosophy, theology, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology, and museology are highly required for every museum work on religion to be in a good position to construct a proper discourse for “sacred” objects.

According to the place of conservation, religious heritage can be classified into two categories: heritage “*in Vitro*” shifted outside the original environment and heritage “*in Situ*” displayed in its original environment such as chapels, churches, synagogues, and mosques.<sup>625</sup> The object kept *in situ* are often subjects of damage, degradation, vandalism, theft, and deterioration due to various climatic variations such as temperature, humidity, and natural radiance, which pushes museums to step in to save valuable items. Museums are one of the most important bodies that actively preserve and protect valuable items and endangered objects and, more importantly, allow visitors to become better acquainted with their heritage.<sup>626</sup> There are divergent positions on the musealization of religious materials and huge arguments back and forth regarding its removal from holy places. It is indisputable that museums actively preserve, promote, and disseminate religious beliefs and practices, increase public understanding of spiritual expressions, and, most importantly, let objects speak for themselves with the least possible interfering. Besides, they provide visitors with a unique opportunity for deeper insight into unfamiliar ways of thinking, religious habits and customs, and help them embrace other faiths and cultures instead of fearing them. The divergence of showing objects’ tangible or intangible dimension places the museum in a very tenuous situation to choose the appropriate approach that ensure respect for objects’ values and suits visitors’ expectations.<sup>627</sup> The

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<sup>623</sup> Michel, É. (1948) *Musées et conservateurs. Leur rôle dans l'organisation sociale*, Bruxelles, Presses de Office de publicité, Bruxelles, p. 11

<sup>624</sup> Paine 2013, p 13.

<sup>625</sup> Desvallées, A., & Mairesse, F. (2011). *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*. Armand Colin, p. 62-65

<sup>626</sup> Filepi, C., & Joanny, C. (2009) *Eglises, Synagogues et Presbytères, Précis Juridique, Conseils d'entretien et de Restauration*, Strasbourg, Ed. Coprur, p. 47-48.

<sup>627</sup> Berteaux, J. (1998). *Musées et collections publiques de France*, numéro spécial « Musées et religion », vol. 2, no 219, p. 4-5

“*Museumification*” remains a phenomenon of gain and loss that may add to objects a patrimonial potency and value very close to sanctity or may remove from their sacred value.<sup>628</sup>

Museums can retain objects’ sacred character by putting more weight on explaining objects’ significance, symbolism, spiritual and devotional values, and by reducing the isolation and loss of meaning in their interpretation. The sacredness does not constitute a space-related factor that fades or disappears in cultural settings but rather changes and gains new significance and personality.<sup>629</sup> These shifts in function create an interbreeding of values and significance that make from experiences conducted in museums and sacred places quite similar.<sup>630</sup> R. Grimes holds this view and maintains that objects acquires a divine character in a specific context and at a given moment and that sacredness is a matter of gaze and temporality that depends on the perception and intention of the viewer.<sup>631</sup> Curators should put more emphasis on bettering visitors’ gaze to objects rather on “*object looking out*”, because the question of meaning and challenge of interpreting depends on the personal perception of individuals.<sup>632</sup> Whereas, on the other hand, museums’ interference in religious matters and their incorporation for sensitive materials has been roundly criticized due to their mismatch with sacred settings.<sup>633</sup> Many scholars maintain that preserving religious objects from deterioration may not be sufficient to provide the required ethical commitment for objects’ sanctity and a true and fair view of their meaning without misinterpretation.<sup>634</sup> In other words, using religious materials as a display tool encloses it in a fictional setting (secular space), removes its spiritual value, and transforms it into a patrimonial item. M. Gruau claims that the sacredness and ceremonial entirety of objects are only fulfilled through their use in devotional rituals.<sup>635</sup> According to this observation, displaying religious and sensitive materials may often not be convenient or propitious for museums because of their secular character and misinterpretation that might occur within their walls. This raises questions as to whether museums are able to dig into deep value and symbolism of objects and preserve their sacredness.

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<sup>628</sup> Heinich, N. (2014). *La fabrique du patrimoine: de la cathédrale à la petite cuillère* (Vol. 31). Les Editions de la MSH, p. 29-30

<sup>629</sup> Ochsè, M. (1973) *Points de vue sur l’art abstrait et sacré*, La Pierre-qui Vire, Ed. Zodiaque, p. 23-24

<sup>630</sup> Cameron, D. (1971). *Le musée: un temple ou forum*. Vagues, une anthologie de la nouvelle museologie, p. 85

<sup>631</sup> Grimes, R. L. (1992). *Sacred objects in museum spaces*. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 21 (4), p. 419-430.

<sup>632</sup> Paine 2013, p 7

<sup>633</sup> Bergot, F. (1996) *Présentation des œuvres d’art à caractère religieux dans les collections publiques* In Ponnau, d. (dir.), *Forme et sens, colloque sur la formation à la dimension religieuse du patrimoine culturel*, Paris, La documentation Française p. 98-102.

<sup>634</sup> Mibach, L. (1992). *Introduction: The conservation of sacred objects*. *Journal of the American institute of conservation*, 1, p. 1-3.

<sup>635</sup> Gruau 1999, p. 30

In the modern era, it seems exceedingly hard to make distinctions between religious and aesthetic works because of the evolution of art in the last two centuries, which took “an aura of the sacred” and made artists worshiped as religious leaders.<sup>636</sup> This fact has allowed several museums to shatter the taboo around discussing religion through collections and art galleries and place special emphasis on the sacred dimension of religious life and the ambiguities of its expressions. The exhibition “*Seeing Salvation –the Image of Christ*” put more emphasis on the profound belief in the sacredness of life than on the artistic and aesthetic design of objects, and through this, enjoyed great success with the public.<sup>637</sup> Similarly, at the Biennale of Singapore, the exhibition “*Belief*” echoed works of 90 artists from 40 countries and addressed through modern art the value and sacredness of religious life. In France, the Centre Pompidou dedicated the exhibition “*Les Traces Du Sacré*” to address spiritual aspects of existence and to explore the relation between the sacral and the aesthetic dimension of religious objects. Interestingly though, the Guimet Museum allowed Buddhist monks to perform necessary ceremonies and rituals of purification for sacred objects displayed in the exposure “*The Religious Treasures of Bhutan*”, which shows that it is possible to guarantee respect for devotional objects within museums and find a compromise on the issue of sacredness. Exhibitions of modern art are increasingly addressing the theme of sacredness, which raises further questions: what are the reasons for this focus? What relationship does museum have with “sacred” objects? Is the notion of “sacred” in museum constructed or deconstructed?

### 4.1. A Museological Approach for the Issue of Sacredness

The issue of defining the notion of “*sacred*” is a vast, far-reaching problem, but still one of great importance to many disciplinary fields.<sup>638</sup> The term “sacred” derives from the Latin “*sacer*” and the root “*sak*”, which refers to the concept of separation. R. Otto had a great influence on understanding religion, being one of the first authors who contributed in analysing the experience of the “sacred” as a sense of fear and feelings of dread from a higher entity.<sup>639</sup> This experience comes out of the profane world and refers to another reality, a reality that M. Eliade described as “*un réel par excellence*”.<sup>640</sup> B. Durrans maintains that this reality hampers

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<sup>636</sup> Goethals, G. T. (1990). *The electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion and the making of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publication, p. 4.

<sup>637</sup> Paine 2013, p. 29.

<sup>638</sup> Bernstein, B. (1992) *Collaborative strategies for the preservation of the North American Material culture*. In Conservation of sacred objects, and other papers from the general session of the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Meeting of the American institute for conservation ,June 3-8 1991, Journal of the American institute for conservation , 31 ,Albuquerque, p. 23-30.

<sup>639</sup> Otto, 1969.

<sup>640</sup> Eliade 1965, p. 85.

the definition of the “sacred” and should be unavoidably oversimplified to make a clear definition, which might be in some cases inappropriate and disrespectful.<sup>641</sup> Since antiquity, the logic of conservation was always linked to places of sacredness (temples) in order to maintain objects of worship in good standing and to add more “*sacralization*” to the places of relics. These activities resulted in various visitation practices (pilgrimage) such as in Jerusalem and Mecca and museums’ activities such as in the Vatican Museum. Indeed, there are striking similarities between museums and temples in terms of practices in situ: examining, cleaning, preserving, respecting, and valuing objects closely resembles faithful practices with devotional objects.<sup>642</sup> Museums do not put forward sacredness in their works because it opposes their secular aspect, which desecrates objects and provides in turn another form of “*sacrality*”.<sup>643</sup> More precisely, artistic works may acquire sacredness in museums such as the work of the *Mona Lisa* that triggers adoration and fascination among people very close to religious veneration.<sup>644</sup>

Museums can construct or deconstruct the “sacred” dimension of objects using “*Patrimonialization*” to desecrate it or “*Museumification*” to consecrate it. However, this process causes further confusion about the nature of objects and a difficulty of distinguishing between sacred, religiously significant, and valuable objects.<sup>645</sup> In museology, believers’ sensibility of objects’ sensitiveness can be highly problematic to conceive exhibitions and may often require various rituals and ceremonies to ensure respect and purification for objects. Some beliefs maintain that a female presence, wrong orientation, or position or association (gender) can disrupt sacred energy and spiritual balance. For this reason, museums are now giving primary attention to sacredness in storing and displaying sensitive materials (special rituals, specific reserves and showcases) and trying very hard to guard against igniting religious sensibilities.<sup>646</sup> C. Paine classifies this “*Respect Treatment*” of sensitive materials in five main practice categories: Handling (restriction of touching), Seeing (time of exhibiting), Storage (height and compatibility), Treatment (harmful or forbidden cleaning substances), and Active honouring (particular rituals).<sup>647</sup> The National Museum of the American Indian tries to provide necessary precaution measurements for the sensitive materials and chooses not to conserve

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<sup>641</sup> Durrans, B. (1995) *Categories and creeds*, *Museums of journals*, 94 (2), p. 25-29.

<sup>642</sup> Paine 2013, p. 10.

<sup>643</sup> De Beyer, M., & Takke, J. (2012). *Guidelines on ways of dealing with religious objects*. Museum Catharijneconvent, p. 10-72.

<sup>644</sup> Christophe, A., & Garnier, M. (2014). En pèlerinage au musée: sur les traces de La Joconde. *Voir la Joconde: approches muséologiques*, p.15-36.

<sup>645</sup> Simpson, S. (1985), *the effects of moral right upon conservation*, *ICGM bulletin*, 1 (3), p. 86-94.

<sup>646</sup> Mairesse, F. (2014). *Le culte des musées*. Académie royale de Belgique, p. 121.

<sup>647</sup> Paine 2013, p. 58.

artefacts with tenuously high sensitive sacredness because of its non-capacity to ensure the necessary religious setting.<sup>648</sup> Similarly, the curators of the London Museum of Humankind hid the “*Inshanti stool*” behind a screen and put a sign mentioning that it is inappropriate for women to have visual contact with it for religious reasons. Such measures did not prevent women from seeing the artefact but implicitly informed visitors about its sacredness, exigency, and significance.<sup>649</sup> In this way, curators showed an attempt to find a compromise that on one hand, ensured respect for objects’ sacredness and, on the other, helped visitors to become acquainted with unfamiliar beliefs and customs.

Regarding the challenge ahead for the museum of religion in exhibiting high “sacred” materials, the Tunisian Rabbi Daniel Cohen confirmed to me that it is possible to find an acceptable compromise between curators and religious authorities to ensure respect for sacred objects and symbols. He claims that a museum of religion could exhibit few pages of the Torah instead of placing the whole book in a showcase, which is inappropriate for its sacred value, and in that way curators help visitors to get a sense of what the Torah may look like without creating a religious insensitivity with the belief.<sup>650</sup> This vision strongly reflects the divinization of the divine word (Torah) such as in the Jewish conception of sacredness and absolutely prohibits its use for a non-religious purpose. On the other hand, Rabbi Daniel Cohen claims that a museum of religion could exhibit religious and semi-religious objects such as Bimah, Ephod, Gartl, Hanukkah, Houmach, Kippah, Kittel, Mehitsa, Menorah, Mezuzah, Parokhet, Tefillin, and Yad without the slightest problem and even juxtapose them with objects from other religions.<sup>651</sup> Similarly, in Islam, it would not be preferable, not to say forbidden, to use the Koran as an exposition piece for cultural and aesthetic purposes because it constitutes an infringement of its sacredness.<sup>652</sup> It is true that the Koran has lost its first function and gradually became an object of collection, decoration, and superstition that serves as a prophylactic element, but it does not legitimize to exhibit it as an artifact. Apart from the Koran, E. Daly claims that there no direct prohibitions of using religious artifacts for cultural purposes on the condition that these objects would be treated with respect and consideration.<sup>653</sup> This means that it is possible to find a way out of the desacralization by establishing a satisfactory balance between religious and cultural

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<sup>648</sup> Drumheller, A., & Kaminitz, M. (1994). Traditional care and conservation, the merging of two disciplines at the National Museum of the American Indian. *Studies in Conservation*, 39, p. 58-60.

<sup>649</sup> M. Maunder (2000) *the conservation of sacred Items*, in Paine, C. (Ed.). (2000). *Godly things: museums, objects and religion*. Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 204.

<sup>650</sup> Interview with the Rabbi of La Goulette, Daniel Cohen conducted on 13.06.2019.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> Interview with Ezzedine Daly Tunisian Iman, conducted on 02.08.2019.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

requirements. The priest Guillaume bruté maintains that exhibiting sacred objects in museums appears to be less complicated in Christianity because objects maintain their factual and "objectual" aspects both within and outside the church without being desecrated.<sup>654</sup> In itself, exhibiting a Christian object, such as a cultural item, does not desecrate it as long as its representation does not offend believers' beliefs or religious symbols.<sup>655</sup> While nothing is inherently problematic with displaying sacred objects in showcases, creating religious intercession with other beliefs and aligning Christian objects with materials from other religions is fully acceptable as long as objects are clearly defined and properly interpreted.<sup>656</sup>

In the new museology, sacredness became a category of "museality", and vice-versa, because by selecting and exhibiting religious material, objects acquire significant value and symbolic weight very close to sanctity.<sup>657</sup> C. Payne held this view and claims that "*Museumification-the entry of an object into a museum- has a sticking parallel with sacralization-the making of an object sacred. Both are processes that remove the object from the mundane world, and most notably remove the object's exchange value*".<sup>658</sup> In other words, "*Museumification*" and "*sacralization*" are very similar in their essence, evolution, and shift to desecration, and many examples underscore this fact such as the Turkish St Sophia, Italian pantheon, and French "*Prieuré royal Saint-Martin-des-Champs*" that were previously temples and morphed over time into museums.

It has become abundantly clear that the notion of "sacred" gradually disappears from our societies in modern times.<sup>659</sup> Despite this withdrawal, museums put great emphasis on giving meaning to neglected religious objects, revitalizing endangered practices and traditions, and raising awareness and critical thinking about social issues and value through religion. C. Paine gives a clear explanation to museums' peculiar focus on dealing with religious matters and claims that the ongoing predominance of religious discourse and globalization impact made others' faith more accessible to people who intend through museums' works to protect their faith and promote it.<sup>660</sup> This concern focuses much more intention on "Religious Reality" as a historically attestable aspect of religion (holy text, symbols, cultic items) to illustrate diversity

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<sup>654</sup> Interview with the priest Guillaume Bruté de Remur conducted on 01.08.2019.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Van Mensch, P. (2015). *Museality at breakfast*, *Museologica Brunensia*, 7, p .14-19.

<sup>658</sup> Paine 2013, p. 2.

<sup>659</sup> Gauchet, M. (1992). *Le désenchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion*. Gallimard, p. 300-336.

<sup>660</sup> Paine 2013, p 3.

far less than on “Reality of Religion”, charged with spirituality and referring to gods.<sup>661</sup> However, it is worth noting that museums’ emphasis on religion and their incorporating “sacred” objects in their collections triggered a strained relationship with religious authorities and often caused conflicts, such as between the French Revolution museum and the Christian church. Several iconoclasts and religious groups stood up consistently against exhibiting “sacred” objects in museums and reclaimed their return to original religious settings on the grounds of museums’ non-conformity with ritual requirements and religious respect. In order to avoid such a situation, several museums clearly mention their respect for objects’ sacredness, value, and symbolism. In St Mango Museum, curators placed a caption to warn visitors, “*The objects on display are sacred to believers, and are treated with respect. However, this is not a religious place but a museum*”.

On the other hand, the Cathedral of Cologne put for its visitors a sign that warns, “*This is not a museum*” to remind them the sacredness, spirituality, and value of the place. In his book *Sacrality and Aura in the Museum*, J. R. Branham maintains that objects’ sacredness is a key factor in forming the “*sacred affective experience*” of believers, however, putting a great deal of emphasis on their formal characteristics in museums would deprive them of their aura.<sup>662</sup> M. Pènicaud holds the same view and confirms that objects’ sacredness was a key feature of “*Shared Holy Places*”, but not its core component and that objects’ sanctity was not an obstacle to provide a posture of respect, distance, and neutrality to all sacred objects.<sup>663</sup> M. Pènicaud claims that it is especially hard to address, materialize, interpret, and explain the intangible dimension of religious objects without providing visitors with a direct line of sight with these artifacts. In other terms, it is considerably complicated for curators to materialize a religious tradition, ritual, or way of thinking and put spiritual experience forward without exhibiting the associated objects, notwithstanding their *sacredness*. M. Pènicaud advocates that religious materials are able to maintain their “sacred” dimension in museums and that a Christian icon does not lose its spiritual value behind glass, and this fact does not prevent visitors from praying in front of it.<sup>664</sup> Moreover, he argued that object sacredness remains a personal interpretation that varies according to individuals’ belief, culture, and territory, and gave an example of foreign curators who paid particular attention to objects that he bought with a small fee from

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<sup>661</sup> Arthur 2000, p 9.

<sup>662</sup> Branham, J. R. (1994). *Sacrality and Aura in the museum: Mute objects and articulate space*. The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery, p. 52-53.

<sup>663</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid

souks worldwide.<sup>665</sup> Pènicaud mentioned that he was criticized for tacking some religious vows of people from a memorial wall in a Turkish monastery after gaining the permission of the monks and displaying them in “*Shared Holy Places*”. He is convinced that he did not betray the vows’ sacred and spiritual value, but rather gave them a chance to persist and testify a ritual and different reading of spirituality.<sup>666</sup> The question that comes down is whether these vows lost their sacred value and became cultural items.

In the modern age, temples seem emptied of their objects, and in return, museums become filled with religious patrimonial wealth.<sup>667</sup> Moreover, people are not giving anymore-excessive importance to objects’ functional sense and semantic use but are rather paying more attention on artifacts creativity and producer (artist, institution, culture, community) than on the object itself. In this way, many objects having religious significance have lost their symbolism and value and acquired new anthropological, historical, and mainly artistic significance.<sup>668</sup> Museums are progressively morphing into modern temples, forums, and spaces that give art another form of sacredness and make from sacred objects the core of veneration and not the medium.<sup>669</sup> This shift adds ambiguity to the religious demarcation and conception of sacred and creates confusion between cultural and religious arenas. The complex relationship between religion and art in modernity has installed further bewilderment in the interpretation of religious/aesthetic artifacts, in particular because several artists addressed through their work of art “*some aspect of the holy*”.<sup>670</sup> R. Otto maintained that in order to express the numinous, art tends often to make use of stillness, gloom, and darkness.<sup>671</sup> The emphasis on expressing humanism added sacredness to art and put some artistic work on the same footing with religious artifacts in terms of significance and value.<sup>672</sup> Such mutations caused a relocation of meaning and a shift from the worship of “*sacred*” objects to the worship of art.<sup>673</sup> These shifts from religious to artistic and vice versa reinforced the position of museums, gave religious objects a chance of survival, and gave rise to the worship of objects. Museums have intentionally refreshed the worship for sensitive objects retaining sacral charges of holiness and triggered a

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid

<sup>666</sup> Ibid

<sup>667</sup> Debray, R. (1992). *Vie et mort de l’image, une histoire du regard en Occident*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 330.

<sup>668</sup> O’Neill, M. (1993). *Keeping the faith*, *Museum journal*, 93 (5), p. 22.

<sup>669</sup> Deloche, B. (1985). *Museologica*, Paris, Lyon, Publication de l’Institut interdisciplinaire d’études Epistémologiques, p. 13.

<sup>670</sup> Van der Leeuw, G. (1963). *Sacred and profane Beauty: the Holy in art*. Holt Rinehart and Winston, p. 189.

<sup>671</sup> Otto, R. (1923). *The idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 68.

<sup>672</sup> Deloche 1985, p. 22.

<sup>673</sup> Clair, J. (2009) *Malaise dans les musées*, Paris Flammarion, Café Voltaire, p. 30-31.

eneration for relics' properties and a form of personhood.<sup>674</sup> Indeed, "*Some objects, of course, are more persons than others, if only because they receive more attention, more relationality. Relics and certain statues stand near the top of this hierarchy...*".<sup>675</sup> This fact explains why Bourguiba avoided addressing the spiritual and sacred dimension of objects in Tunisian museums for fear of strengthening the veneration of the Saints that is very much practiced by Tunisians. Bourguiba did everything in his power to alleviate the retrograde thinking of venerating relics, saints, and organizing religious festivals for Muslim, Jewish, and Christian holy men. It is for this reason that Tunisian museums focused on addressing ancient religion and have not gone deep into the sacred dimension of religious objects, rituals, and practices.

### **4.2. The Issue of Sacredness in Tunisian Museums From the Early 1900s to the Present Day**

In Tunisia, the concept of Sacredness refers to two essential entities: the mosque as a sacred place and the Koran as the "*Word of God*", which require an act of purification to approach either of them. Nonetheless, differing opinions and fatwas exist as to incorporate the Koran in museums' works although the institution of the "*Ulama*" in Tunisia agreed that the desecration of the Koran is a religious sacrilege. This logically explains the non-existence of copies of the Koran in museums despite their aesthetic beauty and variations of writing, bindings, and covers. It should be recalled that the divine message in Islam contains no explicit injunction against representations, it forbids only the "*shirk*".<sup>676</sup> In Tunisian collections, apart from the Koran, the concern of sacredness does not constitute a sensitive topic and a conceptual obstacle that impedes curators to address religion, even if, in either way, they do not put great emphasis on objects' spiritual and sacred aspects. For political and strategic reasons, curators select religious objects according to specific artistic, aesthetic, and patrimonial criteria and not to their spiritual value and devotional significance.

This wilful choice hides the functional sense and spiritual value of religious practices, desecrates sacred objects to works of art, and reduces most of materials' symbolic surroundings. Tunisian museums tackle religion only in its static dimension (doctrines) and not in its dynamic dimension (practices) and provides visitors only with a geographical, social, and historical reading that discards the confessional, devotional, and factual dimension of religion. Their concept is limited to a fixed representation centred on archaeological items that do not make

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<sup>674</sup> Bozoky, E., & Helvétius, A. M. (1999). *Les reliques: objets, cultes, symboles*, Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer) Brepols, p.336.

<sup>675</sup> Paine 2013, p. 9.

<sup>676</sup> Practicing idolatry, polytheism or worshiping of anyone or anything besides Allah.

use of present-day objects of worship and simulative tools to captivate the viewers. Museums such as Bardo, Sousse, and Mahdia are still focusing on displaying antique artifacts from ancient religions (Paganism) despite the availability of contemporary religious objects in their storage area, and museums such as Monastir and Raqqada Museum of Islamic Art have not changed their contents and design since their creation. Such carelessness to Jewish inheritance has pushed the Jewish community of la Goulette to take the lead in creating a private collection called “*House of Jewish Memory /Dar Dhekra*”.<sup>677</sup>

Tunisian Museums do not place enough emphasis on interpreting meanings and outlining religious practices and cultural distinctiveness of living religions, but rather give greater weight to artistic craftsmanship and aesthetic, historical, and archaeological values. However, entirely relying on archaeological objects to address religion provides an extremely narrow clarification, interpretation, and understanding of sacredness, spirituality, and intrinsic value of faiths.<sup>678</sup> Moreover, focusing on showing the positive side of religions (the half-full glass) without tackling sensitive topics such as issues of faith, religious misunderstandings, and liturgical, theological, and devotional differences, remains an incomplete and unsuitable approach because it does not cover religion in all its dimensions, circumstances and evolutions. M. O’Neill offers a powerful critique of this censor that instead of tackling societal challenges and religious misunderstanding obscures the obvious sources of conflict and highlights only ceremonial diversity.<sup>679</sup> The sixty years of experience of such approaches has proven to be restrictive, narrow, and unable to captivate visitors’ interest in religion because of the blatant visual boredom, dull presentation, and superficial interpretation of the collections. I am of the view that there is a genuine need to create a museum of religion in Tunisia to enrich the society fabric through better knowledge and understanding across the divides of religion, provide visitors with opportunities to be acquainted with other beliefs, and gain insight into their religious realms.

Understanding the “sacred complexity” of beliefs, practices, and objects requires a particular peripheral anticipation that only a museum of religion can provide using various interpretational perspectives and intuitive discourse to objects, to its worship, traditions, and initial beliefs. Such projects would help break with the classic superficiality of archaeology, vagueness in

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<sup>677</sup> I personally was one of the curator of this private collection of arts and traditions of Judaism.

<sup>678</sup> Amar, M. (2008). *Quand la religion entre au musée. L'exemple de la Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*. Cahiers de la Méditerranée, (76), p. 2-9.

<sup>679</sup> O’Neill, M. (2010). *SHCG: A community of practice based on empathy and rigour*. Journal of the Social History Curators Group, p.36.

interpretation, secular approach rejecting objects' metaphysical meaning, ethnocentrism, and fear of other religions. There is no religious constraint in opening up on other religions and having a better understanding of their practices, spiritual life, and religious sensibilities. In Islam, there is no religious violation in knowing what chalices, monstrance, and pyxids are, and what Jewish Menorah, Mezuzah, Parokhet look like. Religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Bahaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism have their place in such museums and are, in my opinion, equally important in providing a differentiated overview of beliefs. However, given my survey findings, the majority of respondents (eight of ten) expressed preference for a concept that deals, in the first instance, with the religions of the book. This stance is explained on one hand by a religiously based rejection of non-Abrahamic religions in Islam, and on the other hand by fear of secularity clash with Islamic traditions and proliferation of new religious motions.

In recent decades, secularity has blurred many devotional practices, emptied tradition from their significance, and transformed sacred objects such as the Koran and religious symbols such as the "*Hand of Fatma*" and "*kimpetselt*"<sup>680</sup> into design elements, adornments, and home decor. This shift strips object of their spiritual worth and bestows a historic character upon sacred objects and another layer of complexity in understanding object significance.<sup>681</sup> This denaturation reflects the widespread impact of secularity in neutralizing, shackling, and downsizing religion through the "culturalization" and "aestheticization" of objects in museums.<sup>682</sup> Nonetheless, the secular aspect of museums does not prevent them from addressing religious matters, giving a great deal of importance to objects' aura and putting particular attention on sacredness and spirituality issues. Contrariwise, it is more appropriate to take great efforts to foreground epistemological rigor and explain the sense of sacredness without necessarily adapting a confessional attitude. Indeed, in religious exposure, the more comprehensive, seductive, and driving the interpretation of religious beliefs is, the more visitors' understanding and awareness is stimulated.<sup>683</sup> In the last decade, Tunisia museums have understood this requirement and have taken action to enhance their approach to religion and provide greater visibility for objects' devotional, spiritual, and protective aspects and sacred practices. Bardo, Sousse, and Mahdia Museums started working on objects' dynamic dimensions using oral testimonies, video projections, interactive tools, motion, and artistic

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<sup>680</sup> Jewish amulets for the protection of the newborn male and his mother.

<sup>681</sup> Alpers, S. (1991). *A way of seeing*. Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display, p. 25-32.

<sup>682</sup> Recht, R. (2008). *Penser le patrimoine*. Mise en scène et mise en ordre de l'art, Paris, Éditions Hazan, p.20-21.

<sup>683</sup> Roque 2013, p 24

replenishment to help visitors understand unfamiliar religious meanings and have meaningful and memorable experiences. The exposure "*Bacchanales*" is vibrant proof of this successful approach that made from a religious vase a museographical masterpiece providing visitors with an insight into Roman devotional rituals devoted for the god of the drunkenness and overflows "*Bacchus*". Curators used 3D mapping, motion, and sound to create a spectacular and informative immersive experience that stimulates visitors' interest in Roman religious practices and promotes appreciation and understanding of devotional rituals. They made use of high quality short-focal video projectors and sounds sequences to re-enact simulations of sacred music such as the lyre, archaic zither, and chalumeau. Using advanced museographic tools may accentuate objects' decontextualization and afflict their sacredness; however, it promotes various semantic relationships with religious themes and contributes to a broad religious understanding and practical information to visitors.<sup>684</sup>



*Figure 8 Bacchanal: an interactive approach to religious objects. ©Musuem labs website, retrieved on 19.04.2019*

Even if "*museification*" isolates to a certain degree artifacts from their sacred space, it creates an affective physical and social approximation with visitors, offers a simulation to sacred experience, and socializes religious practices.

### **4.3. The Socialization of the Religious Phenomenon**

In the last decades of the 20th century, critical analysis suggested that religion, as a major system of meaning, is perishing. A view that M. Eliade does not share given its sustainability as a lasting persuasive form of consciousness intervening in personal, social, and cultural

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<sup>684</sup> Amar 2008, p. 33.

spheres.<sup>685</sup> Despite the ongoing global secular environment, religion has broken through the barrier of public spaces and has become ubiquitous in social culture, therefore it deserves to be analysed and even to be questioned. Religion should not be considered in isolation as an immutable and homogeneous phenomenon given its steady evolution, change, and interaction with syncretic and informal groups. Religious phenomenon have observable, neutral, and pluralistic character, do not carry a moral or epistemological judgment, and need to be socialized to persist. Otherwise, it will morph into an outdated concept, expired need, and backward-looking thinking incompatible with contemporary society. Religious socialization became increasingly a larger social phenomenon that overwhelmed various cultural spheres taking place in other arenas than religious institutions. In modern society, this process transmits values and norms through entertainment following modern social and political interest.<sup>686</sup> D. Hicks stresses the importance of the process of socialization for material culture studies and links it with social relationships and object's relation with people.<sup>687</sup> Religious dimensions appear permanently in the cultural tapestry and museological up-to-datedness because museums are putting a lot of effort into helping the public “*understand the play of meaning within the personal lives of religious people and within cultural and religious community*”.<sup>688</sup>

Progressively, museums place more emphasis on interpreting ongoing religious challenges, drawing conclusions, and offering different readings of religion to promote a better understanding of diversity.<sup>689</sup> Many museums organized “*blockbusters*” or “*super exposure*” on religion and generated a record number of visitors during a limited period. Notwithstanding tackling religion became a priority worldwide to create dialogue between different paradigms of interpretation, apprehension and acceptance, this process is still neglected or incorrectly handled in Tunisian museums. Dealing with religion in museums is of no use if it fails to provide answers, share experiences, point out religious interconnection between different faiths, and have a positive influence on society. This calls for a space that specializes in displaying, identifying, reflecting, and interpreting religious beliefs and practice, raising questions of meaning, stimulating critical thinking, and challenging religious certainty. A museum of religion would provide an ideal setting for reflection on religion in its social, political, and cultural dimension and give a breeding ground for debates on critical issues in relation to

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<sup>685</sup> Eliade 1959.

<sup>686</sup> Toft, M. D., Philpott, D., & Shah, T. S. (2011). *God's century: Resurgent religion and global politics*. WW Norton & Company, p. 15-45.

<sup>687</sup> Hicks, D., & Beaudry, M. C. (Eds.). (2010). *The Oxford handbook of material culture studies*. OUP Oxford, p 25-70.

<sup>688</sup> David 2000, p. 53.

<sup>689</sup> Kinard, J. (1992). *Intermédiaires entre musée et communauté*, Mâcon: Editions, p. 108.

religion. The apprehension, analysis, comparison, reflection, and review of religious conviction are certainly undeniable strengths for creating empathy with religious difference and for understanding and acceptance of self and of others. The museum of religion has a social responsibility of providing greater knowledge to religious matter, strengthening open-mindedness and non-judgmental acceptance, giving greater visibilities to religious minorities, and overcoming religious issues and conflicts.

Museums gradually became paramount media that boost the understanding of religion and the appreciating of religious legacy in its cultural and social dimension.<sup>690</sup> Even museums of fine arts moved toward addressing socio-religious phenomena and dealing with articulation issues between culture and religion in society. This cultural democratization of art allowed millions of visitors to have access to religious art and bettered their interpretation for religious functions and meanings without denaturalizing objects' sacredness and value.<sup>691</sup> Even if this process may decontextualize "*Religiosa*", it still helps people apprehend religion in a relevant way and reduce the threat of dogmatism, fundamentalism, and intolerance in society. The taboo that surrounds dealing with sacred objects in museums breaks progressively apart, and public is showing more understanding, involvement, and acceptance for religious exposure if the concept shows respect for religious beliefs and object value. The sensitivity and complexity of the subject require more attention to the discourse used; otherwise the communication fails and leads to misunderstanding. It is difficult to target a wider and heterogeneous audience and meet their expectation with a standardized discourse on religion, but it is feasible with an alternative and innovative discourse that pleases and stimulates critical thinking. Explaining religious concepts and interpreting significance has become an inherent necessity in today's world and, in view of the complexity of the subject matter, the discourse should be easy, precise, informative, and interactive to stimulate their imagination and interest.<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>690</sup> Francastel, P. (1970). *Études de sociologie de l'art* (Vol. 74). Editions Gallimard. Paris, p. 257-261

<sup>691</sup> Glorieux, G. (2015). *L'histoire de l'art: objet, sources et méthodes*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, p. 109-111.

<sup>692</sup> Barbe-Gall, 2012, p. 17-18.



Figure 9 Informative discourse about religious materials in Christianity for schoolchildren at Bardo Museum. <https://www.erlm.tn/lgf/la-classe-musee/>, retrieved on 20.04.2019

That is precisely what numerous museums as Bardo, Sousse, Mahdia, and El Jem are currently making to broaden children's knowledge about religion and familiarize them with traditions of other religious communities. Displaying religion in museums does not address the issue of believing or not, but rather decrypts both antithetic and religious facets of objects, explains concepts, analysis perspectives, compares practices, challenges certainty, and reflects value to enhance visitors' critical thinking and empower them to act responsibly and respectfully with other faiths and participate in creating safe and tolerant community. Socializing religion, questioning religious attitudes, exploring spirituality, and reflecting on its impact on morality, education, and daily life does not challenge personal ethics or call convictions into question, on the contrary, it develops freedom of spirit, reduces prevailing tension, and helps religious minority leap from the shadows, which is exactly what Tunisia needs to achieve further progress. Even if socializing religions in museums remains a phenomenon of gain and loss that on one hand may change object status and amends its meaning, it brings religion closer to youth and raises their religious, moral, and intellectual awareness on the other, which is worth risking to achieve harmony and inter-religious understanding. Over the past ten years, the need for creating better understanding of religious diversity has become increasingly clear in Tunisia to reduce religious prejudice, hatred, and discrimination, which are perennial sources of social conflict and violence. Notwithstanding the exceptionality of Tunisia in terms of inclusiveness and openness to ethical and religious differences, Tunisians would not be as tolerant as people think.<sup>693</sup> This fact requires further endeavours to build tolerance through education and raising awareness in museums to reach all age groups and instil acceptance, which is vital to peace and social harmony.

<sup>693</sup> Ayari, M. B. (2009). *Tolérance et transgressivité: le jeu à somme nulle des gauchistes et des islamistes tunisiens*. L'Année du Maghreb, (V), p. 183-203.

The religious dimension of human existence should not, for political and perspective grounds, be superficially treated, maligned, and disrespected. In Tunisian museums, putting secularism forward proved to be a drawback for understanding and dealing with religion, strengthened the rejection of multiculturalism, and created an ambiguous position with national identity. I am of the view that a museum of religion might be an ideal solution to build confidence, trust, understanding, and consensus around the issue of religion, generate civic and intellectual engagement with religious otherness, and breaks with the unilateral and aesthetic interpretation of artifacts. However, great care should be taken to provide Tunisians with a coherent, meticulous, precautionary, and innovative approach to religion to ensure a qualitative work and avoid repeating the same mistakes that made from other collections “*cultural abattoir*”<sup>694</sup> for religious objects. In this respect, J. Goa David maintains that “*to build such collections, we must first, of course appreciate the ground we are about to step onto. We must appreciate what it means to enter a distinct cultural world what our moral responsibilities are and what the limits of our work may be*”.<sup>695</sup> The Hammamet Museum of Civilization and Religion, open to the public in 2014, represents the first initiative that attached particular importance to the spiritual and devotional dimensions of religion and to the exploration of Tunisian ethnic and religious diversity, which requires an in-depth analysis of its approach and strategy.

#### 4.4. Reflection on the Hammamet Museum of Religions and Civilization

Practically the world over, museums of religions are constantly emerging and tackling multiculturalism as a challenge and not as a source of conflict. Exhibitions of religion have successfully popped up in Muslim countries such as Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia, in which there is some disagreement over the question of aniconism. What is unusual, however, is that a hotel complex in Tunisia took the lead in creating a museum of religion dedicated to all faiths that marked Tunisian history.<sup>696</sup> As other public museums, the collection highlights ancient beliefs from Punic, Roman, and Byzantine eras but places much greater importance on monotheistic religion, which is what gives it its characteristic feature. As a sign of dialogue and tolerance, it explores the major characteristics of the religions of the book and highlights their common denominators. It aims to bring religions under a single roof, familiarize visitors with faiths other than Islam, and raise their awareness about the country’s diversity. What makes this collection particular is that, unlike public museums, it provides visitors with an insight into past

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<sup>694</sup> Cultural abattoir or cemetery is a metaphor for the decontextualization of object. Rivière, G. H. (1989). *La muséologie selon Georges-Henri Rivière : cours de muséologie, textes et témoignages*, Dunod, Paris, p. 402.

<sup>695</sup> David 2000, p 47.

<sup>696</sup> The museum lies inside the medina of Hammamet and belong to the hotel Diar lemdina.

and actual rituals and practice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and displays rare and unfamiliar religious collectibles, manuscripts, and engravings. However, its weak points are of several kind: there are numerous museological, museographic, scenographic, and conceptual errors, which led to the trivialization and "*folklorisation*" of religious objects. There is a distracting visual chaos, difficulties in understanding meanings or finding itineraries, and, more importantly, there is no ethical nor religious consideration for objects' value, significance, and sacredness. This observation might seem a little harsh, but the collection has a lot in common with medieval curiosity cabinets, in which collectors arbitrarily placed objects without any scientific concordance.

Regardless of their sacred value, many liturgical objects such as crosses, rosaries, and handwritten manuscripts are blindly put together with jewels and paintwork without any aesthetic coherency for objects' nature, colours, and height. The design does not take sufficient account of visual appeal and viewer-friendliness and grouped in a same showcase objects with different dimension and position (standing, lengthened, beside). Unlike the museum's ergonomic standards, some displays stand in inaccessible corners for viewers and contain more than 20 items without any labels, which is a fatal error in scenography that leads to visual fatigue and confusion. The labels stand far, high, and exceed the optimum viewing band (110-165cm), which led to a bad vantage point. These plastic, white placards and printed-paper glued on dark backgrounds do not meet the minimum standards of scenography in terms of form and content, and raises a number of questions about field supervision.



Figure 10 *Museographic discordance and space mismatch in Jewish and Christian hall.* ©Hamdouni

This work does not adhere to scientific standards of studies of religion, ethnography, museology, and museography because it compromises, disrespects, and offends objects' value and sacredness due to the deplorable condition of conservation and display. The pictures here

show a blatant discordance and mismatch between religious objects and their status and functions. Showcases display objects of different natures ranging from statuette, paintwork, ceramics, marriage contract, and diary without any thematic focus, and even worse, some of them stand on the floor, which is gravely detrimental for the condition of preservation. Religious objects have stories, biographies, and life, just like humans, and therefore have requirements, behaviours, and influences.<sup>697</sup> This observation is not stressed in the Hammamet collection due to its poor design that deprives objects from life and sanctity and puts them in a state of hibernation. The “folklorization” and trivialization of religious practices to please tourists is a mistreatment of religious objects, an offence against their value, and needs an urgent intervention and museographic follow-up to improve this approach.

In displaying religious and sensitive materials, curators should attach particular importance to all the objects’ dimensions: below, beyond, above, close, and beside to ensure protection, visual aesthetics, and respect for artifacts.<sup>698</sup> This museum (HMRC) does not meet this requirement, as numerous objects suffer from poor storage, conservation, and display due to a lack of comprehensiveness and aesthetic coherence, which gives a distorted impression of an amateur work. Moreover, display tools are substandard, outdated, and mostly made of wall-mounted showcase, glass cases with wood frames, and cardboard models. In museums, showcases are undoubtedly the display’s core features, but over time, new tools emerged such as scale models, leaflets, dioramas, trails, education packs, and reconstructions to add some further clarification on objects. As shown below, such display tools are not available, and as can be seen in the pictures below, even the classic tools are misused, objects are misplaced, and showrooms are poorly lit.

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<sup>697</sup> Davis, R. H. (2009). *The Dancing Shiva of Shivapuram: Cult and Exhibition in the Life of an Indian Icon*. Amanda Millay Hughes and Carolyn H. Wood, *A Place for Meaning: Art, Faith, and Museum Culture*, Chapel Hill, NC: Ackland Art Museum, p. 82.

<sup>698</sup> Drumheller & Kaminitz 1994, p 59-60.



Figure 11 Outdated design, display tools, and inappropriate lighting techniques. ©Hamdouni

It is important to stress that preserving sensitive objects relies on two complementary processes: a reactive conservation of ethical pre-determined standards of objects (synthetic, physical, conceptual, and aesthetical integrity) and a proactive conservation to control their surroundings and extend their survival.<sup>699</sup> Any prejudice of these standards and integrity would compromise objects' recognition and reinfuse different meaning and significance, which might cause the loss of their sacred values. The meaning and significance of religious practices are inextricably tied up with objects, which means that their deterioration, mishandling, and misrepresentation leads automatically toward erroneous interpretation of their functions and usefulness. In religious collections, providing good access, preservation, and pitch for objects are mandatory requirements to maintain their aura and promote reflection on their spiritual and ethical dimension. This implies that museums should make an all-out effort to provide appropriate conservation and environmental conditions for artifacts to avoid their degradation and provide them with better presentation.<sup>700</sup> As shown below, pollutant materials endanger many exhibits such as liturgical items, ablution objects, religious manuscripts, and dowers, and puts them at risk of moisture, fungi, insects, high temperature, and light. many biological agents such as mold, mildew, and fungus spores may be visible in showcases and on showrooms walls, which are grave and imminent dangers to objects and calls for rapid intervention. More serious still, two-thirds of the exhibits are not placed in showcases but are hung on walls and might be repeatedly touched by visitors, which is a serious museological error.

<sup>699</sup> Maunder 2000, p 197.

<sup>700</sup> Goffard, C. (2009, April). *Eviter l'erreur: le choix de matériaux stables pour le stockage et l'exposition des collections muséales*. In *CeROArt*. Conservation, exposition, Restauration d'Objets d'Art (No. 3). Association CeROArt asbl, p. 1-10.



Figure 12 Mold, mildew, and fungus surrounding religious objects. ©Hamdouni

In Museography, using the appropriate lighting techniques and colour temperatures are decisive factors for creating visual comfort and retaining visitors longer in museums. I am of the view that the fatal flaw of this collection lies in its lighting plan that triggers a visual noise and unpleasant yellowish colour and warmth, which spoils the objects' aesthetic appearance. Numerous shortcomings, some of them serious, negatively affected the atmospheric lighting such as the lack of dimmers and filters to block UV or I.R. radiation and the incorrect adjustment of projectors' angle of incidence between sources and objects. The amount of light reaching the exhibits is most probably set arbitrarily because it does not take into account the nature and source material of objects.<sup>701</sup>

The use of neon tubes and rudimentary spots makes exhibits unsightly and creates visual discomfort and a dismal atmosphere, which do not suit religious collections that require freshness of colours. Dark colours such as black and bleak yellow are signs of mourning, gloom, and dejection in many religions and it is preferable not to use them in religious collections to maintain a convivial atmosphere of learning. Clear white and very light blue improve visual comfort, increase the amount of daylight, and gives visitors a feeling of enjoyment, and have been for these reasons used in "*Shared Holy Places*".<sup>702</sup> As shown in the picture below, there is blatant contrasts, backlighting, and deep shadows in the showrooms, which may heavily disturb visitors' vision.

<sup>701</sup> There are standards to be met for the lighting of different types of objects: around 50 lux is recommended for light-sensitive objects such as textiles, natural history specimens, graphic and photographic works, about 150-200 lux for polychrome woods and paints, and not more than 300 lux for materials insensitive to light and ultraviolet) such as metal, glass, stone and ceramic. Colette, N.& Bergeron, A. (1995) *La lumière et l'éclairage*. Conservation préventive dans les musées. Manuel d'accompagnement, p 15 -20.

<sup>702</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.



Figure 13 Unsuitable lighting plan and problem of excessive contrast and backlighting. ©Hamdouni

This, combined with a stony silence creates irritation and sensations of discomfort and makes objects difficult to understand and concepts tough to grasp. That has come about because of a lack of sound effects to condition visitors, create a feeling of deep relaxation, and renew objects' vitality. Sonography creates a microcosm that explores concepts deeply, offers new avenues for reflection, engages visitors, and brings visitors to emotional experiences.<sup>703</sup> Moreover, it entertains, orients, and encourages visitors to move forward and discover more about the collection.<sup>704</sup> The fact that the museum does not have a curator and provides only one employee to sell tickets, guide visitors, and explain objects' meaning largely explains these grave errors in sonography, museography, and serious offences for objects' meanings and value.

C. Paine claims that even if objects are active players in museum alliance (object-curator-visitor), the curator holds the crucial role in this triumvirate given his key role in selecting, controlling objects, and conveying information.<sup>705</sup> S. Simpson claims that even the fulfilment of all museological and museographical requirements does not necessarily provide respect for objects' value and sacredness, because, in certain cases, some ethical standards might be disrupted through these requirements.<sup>706</sup> In this collection, it make no sense to address the question of sacredness because it does not even meet the minimum of aesthetic, Museographic, and conservation standards. Numerous religious objects and concepts are deformed from their inception such as the semi-circular niche "*Mihrab*", which should indicate the "*Qibla*", but is set out in the wrong direction, and the Prayer pulpit "*Minbar*" that should be placed beside "*Mihrab*" and not inside of it. More serious still, most of the commonly used objects are neither

<sup>703</sup> Stocker, M. (1994). *Exhibit sound design for public presentation spaces*. Museum Management and Curatorship, 13 (2), p. 177-183.

<sup>704</sup> Stocker, M. (1995). *La conception sonore d'une exposition*. Museum International, 47 (1), p. 25-28.

<sup>705</sup> Paine 2013, p. 17.

<sup>706</sup> Simpson 1985, p. 87-92.

religious nor spiritual, which reflect an unawareness, not to say ignorance, of objects' significance and meaning. As shown in pictures below, the architectural plan is inconvenient for a museum and has much in common with a normal residence fitted with classic rooms and doors. This means that this place was previously a dwelling then converted to a museum of religion, which does not comply with ICOM's code of ethics that clearly prohibits all forms of objects' mistreatment. Removing religious artifacts from their original context and placing them in an appropriate space divests them of their sacred value and complicates the interpretation of their devotional purpose.<sup>707</sup> V. W. Turner claims that a reasonable and consistent approach to religion should attach particular importance to contested and evolving "multivocality" of religious life and its symbolism.<sup>708</sup>

The Hammamet Museum does not take into account this approach since it reduces religion to a few ethnological aspects and neglects its relationship with the spiritual depth of human existence. Moreover, it does not maintain neutrality and balance in space allocation between religions and gives Islamic materials a predominance in space and content.



Figure 14 Classical architectural plan and distortion of objects' meaning and functions. ©Hamdouni

With regard to exposure's core messages, there is a clear message behind this collection to promote reconciliation, openness, recognition, inclusion, and hope to cultivate the religious difference as a humanizing element and not as a source of conflict. At the museum entrance, a quote engraved in stone on the walls says, "Today I have built a synagogue, a mosque and a cathedral, to pray in the name of love for all beings, so that the ancestral injustices disappear, and to flourish fraternity that tends to disappear".<sup>709</sup> Unlike public museums, this collection

<sup>707</sup> R. Burman (2000) *Presenting Judaism: Jewish museum in Brittan*, In Paine, p. 132.

<sup>708</sup> Turner, V. W. (1967) *Ritual symbolism, morality and social structure among the Nbemdu*, in Turner, V. W a forest of symbols. Ithaca, NY: Cornell university press, p. 48-51.

<sup>709</sup> Quote of the Tunisian author Ali Fouzi Gabbiche. Personal Translation from French into English.

lights up Tunisians' multifaceted identity and provides visitors with an insight into religious practice not as historical facts but rather as ways of living. It tries to establish a dialogue between religions and help visitors be acquainted with religious objects and practices of faiths other than Islam. The museum's director maintains that this project is a private initiative, not funded by the State, which seeks to display ancient and contemporary religious objects from different faiths without discrimination.<sup>710</sup> The collection relies largely on donations from religious communities and personal contributions, which, together, offered a glimpse into Tunisian religious past.<sup>711</sup>

I value this endeavour to explain religion, familiarize the public with religion other than Islam, and foster religious tolerance. The concept itself is highly instructive, linking Islam with other religions and ways of living, but its chief deficiency remains the tourism-centric view that has dominated the scientific side. The collection targets primary tourists and visitors from abroad, which made the folkish aspect more dominant than religious emphasis. I would not classify it as a museum of religion but rather as a museum exhibiting religious, semi-religious, and cultural objects or a "*folk museum*" displaying "*folk religion*". C. Paine's description for such museums that display, "*Images in paint, carved wood, print, bronze or ceramic depicts god or gurus, religious scenes or preachers. Prayers books and rosaries recall individual piety [...] many of these things are personal items, but other relate to the family, particularly items associated with the rite of passage...*"<sup>712</sup> fits completely with the Hammamet museum that does not cover the important dimensions of religion. My critical appraisal relies on review for conservation and displaying conditions, ways of interpretation available, information, and emphasis put on objects' significance. All requirements of scenography, museography, religious approach, and curator miss the mark, which makes in my opinion its classification as a museum of religion senseless. It is essential that that a museum of religion allows objects to reconstruct a fact, develop a representation of a reality, and recreate a devotional context to keep objects' aura and avoid reducing them to artistic production.<sup>713</sup> The problem here lies in the fuzzy, imprecise, and ambiguous ways of displaying objects and interpreting practices, which, in certain cases, introduced some faiths as religion sucked in a time warp and presented their believes as ancient religious groups and not as groups of contemporary society. One of the primary purpose of museums of religions is to counteract misperception, offset stereotypes, and display evidence

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<sup>710</sup> Personal interview with the head of the museum Slim Bouzghenda September 2017.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> Paine 2013, p. 102.

<sup>713</sup> Rock 2013, p. 34.

of religious continuity and adaptation to new circumstances. This exposure brought out Judaism as a religion entrapped in time and focused on displaying ancient objects, which makes visitors believe that there is no continuation for Jewish tradition in contemporary Tunisia.

The concept of a museum of religion should be dynamic and multi-dimensional, linking various aspects of religion. It should adopt a multifaceted approach that on one hand stresses individuals' role, religious identity, and community dimension in society,<sup>714</sup> and attaches particular to beliefs and objects sacred dimension apart from their artistic qualities.<sup>715</sup> Museums of religion have become truly multidisciplinary projects and working methods evolved to cover more religious dimensions and contexts using multiple skills and key actors for better museographic and artistic know-how.<sup>716</sup> A museum of religion should be a result of an iterative and collective work that emphasizes all shifts of artifacts "*Museumification*" and "*sacralization*". This implies reflections from different scientific disciplines such as studies of religion, museology, anthropology and involvement of new science such as scenography, sonography, and museography to make this project a success and touch as many people as possible. The exposure "*Shared Holy Places*" adopted a contextual approach to display sacred objects and places in the Mediterranean and used advanced design tools to interpret their religious dimension. Did it succeed in bridging religions and ensuring compliance with the needed requirement?

#### **4.5. The Exhibition Shared Holy Places in the Bardo Museum: A Distinct Approach to Religion in Museums**

In Tunisia, religion is a profoundly critical theme and a blind spot that was not addressed in art, only a few painters and artists showed interest in the production of religious works and crossroads between faith. Therefore, it was necessary for the MUCHEM team to find a way out of the lack of religious works that deals with religious and ethnic intermingling, and the loophole was the juxtaposition of objects. For M. O'Neill, the startling juxtaposition of objects was unthinkable in the framework of religious exhibitions for numerous ethnic and cultural reasons.<sup>717</sup> However, M. Pénicaud claims that it is only through juxtaposition that curators are able to create links and continuum between objects, practices, and beliefs.<sup>718</sup> He maintains that

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<sup>714</sup> Rivière 1989, p. 137.

<sup>715</sup> Gob & Drouguet, 2004, p. 30-31.

<sup>716</sup> Buggeln, G., Paine, C., & Plate, S. B. (Eds.) 2017.

<sup>717</sup> O'Neill, M. (1995). *Exploring the meaning of life: the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art*. Museum international, 47 (1), p. 50.

<sup>718</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

there is no religious deformation and infringement to put side by side a ceramic tile of Jesus dating from the fourth century and a page of blue Koran because it creates ties between significance.<sup>719</sup> Similarly, juxtaposing religious objects from shrines and religious temples with paintings, sculptures, images, and films help explains adequately their spiritual, symbolic, and imagined aspects and stresses more clearly the importance of religious diversity.<sup>720</sup>

Unlike many curators who find it unseemly to put films next to paintings or photographs, Pénicaud considers that this heterogeneity serves the purpose of knowledge and familiarization and that assembling religious objects and museographic supports offers further complementarism and deep interpretation to provide a more accurate picture of religions.<sup>721</sup> I think that the usage of these museographic tools is explained mainly by deficiency of religious objects and works of art in Tunisia dealing with the spiritual and religious formation and sharing, but also by their indispensable help in creating and disseminating knowledge through interactivity. "*Shared Holy Places*" attached particular attention on interpreting ethnographic, religious, and spiritual dimensions of objects, practices, and places without betraying their symbolism and sacredness.<sup>722</sup> The exposure offered a rector of diffusion and material translation of ethnographic observation that draws on filmic images to contextualize sacred objects and sites, interpret rituals, and transmit testimonies.

This itinerant exposure changes its shape, content, and angle of reflection in every hosting country and enriches itself with Aboriginal heritage while keeping its core message: sharing and diversity. It made use of Tunisian religious objects from the Bardo Museum's storage space or borrowed from other museums and juxtaposed with items of MUCEM. The scenario put great weight on interpreting spiritual practice and providing visitors with accurate information on prophets, St. Mary, signs and prophylactic symbols, and water and light significance. Displaying the similarities in rites, symbols, objects' meaning, and beliefs and showing the differences in interpretation were the main axes of the exposure. Curators tackled the symbolism of the light in the monotheism by juxtaposing photographs of Hanouka and Jewish lamps with "*Pupput*", a Christian lamp fitted with three beaks that refers to Christian trinity with a "*Mu'izz*" lantern and its numerous holes that reflects Islamic quietude and asceticism.<sup>723</sup> This shared emphasis on light as spiritual guidance for believers has been put forward to stress

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<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Ben Lazreg, N. (2016) *la religion, un lieu de rencontre*, in Lieux saint partagés exposition au musée national du bardo 18 novembre 2016-12 février 2017, catalogue, p 11.

the importance of religious unity and progress. Moreover, terracotta jars decorated with Berber signs stood side by side with Islamic bronze aquamanile to explain the importance of water for religious practices and daily life. The shared sacred persons such as Marie has been highlighted by juxtaposing two statues of the Dea Mater and a religious artwork from Islam, in which is engraved in Arabic calligraphy on gold plate the surah of Mary.



Figure 15 Spatial and religious transversality of religious objects. ©Hamdouni

This juxtaposition highlights the perennity of Mother Goddesses in religion and go beyond time and monothetic framework to reflect a realism in perceiving religious dimensions to hold the truth. “*Shared Holy Places*” put a great deal of importance on showing the spatial and temporal transversality of religious objects to help visitors apprehend unfamiliar concepts. Moreover, it addressed the Tunisian peaceable cohabitation of religious communities and the shared devotional practice in sanctuaries throughout the Mediterranean. Curators used sacred objects, sculptures, paintings, photographs, and video to illustrate how Muslims prayed in common to God in churches and synagogues. Such practices explained to visitors that despite differences in conviction, believers are similar in their piety and spontaneity, and that accepting each other helps build peace and harmony.

Unlike the refusal of recognition and lack of knowledge and understanding about other religions that often lead to hatred, exclusion, and conflicts, “*Shared Holy Places*” gave visitors an opportunity to discover Mediterranean common religious spaces and ethical and aesthetic denominators with a focus on Tunisian distinctiveness. It reflected the similarities of beliefs and traditions, shed light on their differences, and put forward the spiritual and human interbreeding despite theological divergence. It offered several reading levels ranging from symbolic, contextual, and aesthetic, and visitors chose the approach most suited to them.

As will be demonstrated in chapter III (survey analysis), this contextual approach has proven successful in seducing, stimulating interest, and extending visitors' time of visit. In the next chapter, I will expand on the perceived value and the perceived value of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" based on an empirical study that surveyed 300 visitors during the exposure to estimate the probability of success of a museum for religions in Tunisia.

### III. Empirical Research Methodology

#### 1. Identification and Operationalization of the Problem

##### 1.1. The Research Problem

Tunisian museums generally overlook two key factors necessary to improve visitors' experience in religious exposures. The first point concerns the immaterial dimension of religious heritage severely neglected in most museums that from a historical standpoint give priority to objects' tangible and aesthetic aspects. Moreover, in view of the daunting complexity and challenges of religion, a deadlock occurred and weeded exhibitions that deal with religious sensibilities and spiritual and devotional practices. The sticking point lies in a state policy that admits religious differences but does not try to widen access to different religious cultures and to breach the protective walls of religious conviction. Religious difference should no longer represent a taboo that contributes in excluding it from museum work, on the contrary, it should be rethought, discussed, and exhibited while retaining its symbolism, as it the case in museums of religion in Canada, Germany, Scotland, and Russia.

Tunisian visitors are not used to an ethnological approach that addresses objects' spirituality and sheds light on its sense and sacredness since it took an exceedingly long time until museums addressed religion differently on the basis of sociological, psychological, philosophical, and didactic-epistemological perspective. It is time for Tunisian museums to free themselves from an obsolete mentality that forbids acquaintance and refuses reflection and reasoning to avoid shocking visitors; museums should question religion and put truth into doubt. This process can be achieved only through promoting the principle of the democratization of culture and reconsidering exhibition approach and content with the aim of enhancing religious discourse and increasing sensitivity to ethnic and religious diversity and attracting a wider public. This religious awareness is an important social asset to shed light on religious identities and understand others' faiths, rituals, and traditions.

The second point concerns the lack of research instruments as empirical investigations and public consultation play an integral role in adjusting the offer to visitors' needs and requirements and to the technological advancement of the communication and museographical techniques. The analysis of the public interest, psychology, and expectation is a science unto itself that becomes an efficient working tool extensively developed in museography's leading countries. A museum's survey remains the best objective way to get to know public, stay in close touch with its preferences, and identify its expectations. This assessment process focuses

on streamlining efficiency of museum offerings and requires a permanent dialogue with the public to ensure better performance management.<sup>724</sup> From 2003 onward, Tunisians opted to go down this road and carry out surveys in a few museums with the aim of enhancing the cultural offer and adapting it with visitors' psychological or sociological profile. Nonetheless, enhancing the accessibility and comprehensibility of religious heritage requires not only a knowledge of the visitors but also finding linkages between religious objects and the visitor's one culture to facilitate understanding. This process implies, on one hand a diversity of approaches to the question of religion, and on the other hand breaking the vacuum in museums and relying on innovative museographic supports to help visitors assimilate objects' significance and symbolism as has been the case in "*Shared Holy Places*".

My survey queried an itinerant exhibition that addressed religion in the Mediterranean with a focus on inter-confessional encounters in Tunisia. This exposure relied on an innovative approach in terms of displaying religious heritage based on juxtaposition of objects with a historical, anthropological, ethnological, and religious verticality. This approach reflects a high focus on displaying religious meaning, signs, forms, practice, and beliefs and providing decoding and reading tools for an uninformed public to support understanding and foster a sense of autonomy in interpretation. In museums, reinforcing linkage between visitors' perceived value and quality of commodities represent a key asset used to strengthen communication, mediation, and ergonomics.<sup>725</sup> For Woodruff,<sup>726</sup> Kashyap, and Bojanic,<sup>727</sup> the perceived quality is a tremendous asset to conceive a successful product given its direct and significant impact on two fundamental matters in building loyalty (perceived value and satisfaction). Their studies have demonstrated that the higher the visitor's satisfaction is, the higher the desire to repeat the experience.

Nonetheless, in religious exposures and given the complexity of the subject, visitors expect more dynamic scenography, modern museography, and proper pedagogical objects' treatment capable of facilitating the understanding of significance and the assimilation of knowledge and, more importantly, break the fear of religious otherness. That means that in a museum of religion, the quality of realization will be decisive in the visitor's assessment. It should place the visitor in a vivid atmosphere of emotion and spirituality, take heed of his ergonomic,

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<sup>724</sup> Davallon, J., & Gottesdiener, H. (1992). *Le musée national des techniques sous l'œil de ses visiteurs*. La revue du Musée des arts et métiers, 1, p. 34-35.

<sup>725</sup> Žabkar, V., Brenčič, M. M., & Dmitrović, T. (2010). *Modelling perceived quality, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions at the destination level*. Tourism management, 31(4), p.537-546.

<sup>726</sup> Woodruff, R. B. (1997). *Customer value: the next source for competitive advantage*. Journal of the academy of marketing science, 25(2), p. 139-153.

<sup>727</sup> Kashyap, R., & Bojanic, D. C. (2000). *A structural analysis of value, quality, and price perceptions of business and leisure travelers*. Journal of travel research, 39 (1), p. 45-51.

physical, and mental wellbeing. Therefore, my research will require the museological, museographical, and communicational tools of “*Shared Holy Places*” from an analytical standpoint, assess visitors’ satisfaction based on two key components (perceived quality and value), and find out about their role in ensuring visitors’ enjoyment and concept acceptance.

In a second phase, I will provide a comprehensive review to the exhibit to identify what has worked, what has pleased, and what has not, and develop a profile of priorities, requirements, suggestions and sticking point in terms of conceiving a museum of religion in Tunisia. In drawing lessons from exhibits’ strengths and weaknesses, the outcome of this research will be subsequently used to forecast the success rate of the museum and to increase its effectiveness. The issue that arises is how to hit the positive thinking of visitors and prevent offending religious convictions, sensitivities, and attitudes. In assessing the impact of the approach used in “*Shared Holy Places*” on visitors and their degree of acceptance for the concept, I will be able to determine what approach the museum should take to suit Tunisian visitors’ nature, psychology, and expectation and the acceptable boundaries that should not be exceeded. Apprehending the meaning of religious artifacts requires giving particular attention to ergonomic, communication, mediation, and scenario consistency and value without neglecting the relevance of the ludic and education lens. The museology, museography, and scenography used in museums of religion have evolved to enhance visitors’ spiritual, emotional, and intellectual sensitivities, and consequently expectation grew up in front of advanced forms of displaying.

It has become necessary for museums of religion to add life to objects, create emotion, calm and relax moods to provoke reflection, tackle religious prejudice, and overcome difference. The first issue has been to understand the psychological character of visitors, which is done by analysing their interest’s degree in religious exposures, open-mindedness, convenience, interaction, and religious redline that affect overall satisfaction, and then to identify the success factors of the exhibit and therefore reduce the risk variables in my proposal. Based on the collected, inventoried, and classified data bank "observatory", I will check the reliability and relevance of my project study through a thorough analysis of the exposure to evaluate my hypotheses. Through this observatory, I will propose museological principles and effective tools to advance museographic and communicational transmission of knowledge needed for a museum of religion. I will put into perspective M. Pénicaud’s way of addressing religion, review his resources, and quantitatively assess the success of his approach with the Tunisian public. My aim is to develop a stimulating reflection and a critical approach that analyses the

overall assessment of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" and compile a list of practical guidelines, suggestions, and recommendations of the 300 visitors surveyed throughout my research. Such a research basis would be a great asset to refine my proposal to conceive a museum of religion and overcome common failures of past approaches such as that of the Hammamet Museum of Religion and Civilization.

On the basis of gathered data, I will put the focus on visitors' preferences in terms of religion and appoint as appropriately as possible what should be displayed and what not, and whether this museum should confine itself to displaying only common religions in Tunisia or encompass religions of the whole world. The second point to examine is the visitors' involvement in the exposure and the strategy of a long-term commitment to the institution, these two factors touch the core of any museum perception and valuing. By implication, visitors feel involved, privileged, and challenged, which enhances their experience, and accordingly positively affects exhibition's assessment.<sup>728</sup> In real terms, the more visitors feel involved in the exposure as committed players through manual or intuitive manipulation of devices, the more their satisfaction increases. In "*Shared Holy Places*", I noticed an active involvement of visitors that have manipulated museographic panels and videos to get more precise and complete information about religious artifacts. This process created a binary interaction linking visitors with exhibited objects, awakened their curiosity for inquiry, ignited their interests in religion, engaged critical thinking, and thus transformed them through the visit's components. Indeed, providing qualitative and modern experiences that resonate with visitors' understanding ensures high levels of satisfaction and intentionally provokes an advertising through oral recommendation drawing on a circulation by word of mouth.

Through my survey, I will check how to deliver unique experiences to the public, how to create links between visitors and artifacts, and how to engage the public in advertising for the museum. Like most other exhibitions, the weakness of "*Shared Holy Places*" has been the marketing and the advertising management. Pénicaud stressed that the Bardo Museum had not known how to fully take advantage of "*Shared Holy Places*" due to a poor marketing strategy that missed the significant weight of the event and passed up the opportunity to engage public interest in religion.<sup>729</sup> A museum of religion should give weight to free advertising as well as targeted-

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<sup>728</sup> Le Marec, J. (2002). *Le musée à l'épreuve des thèmes sciences et sociétés: les visiteurs en public*. Quaderni, (46), p. 105-117.

<sup>729</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

advertising to promote its collections, engage more visitors in religion, and build wider audiences. If this aspect is neglected, as in the case at the Hammamet Museum of Religion and Civilization, the level of visitation will continue to decline and therefore museum renewal will automatically stagnate. The major mistake committed in this museum has been overlooking the weight of the local public and placing tourists as a priority in cultural investment. A museum of religious should target particularly the Tunisian public and provide it with knowledge to open up their minds to religious difference, broaden their outlook to new perspective and possibilities of coexistence, and show them that nothing must be taken for granted.

#### 1.2. The Choice of the Survey Field

As technology progresses, the operational principles and practices in museums evolve and visitors' expectancy increases, and this means that the field research remains the best way to get closer to the research subject, assess assumption, and draw conclusions through statistical analysis of product quality and visitors' feedback. I have chosen "*Shared Holy Places*" to conduct my empirical study for a variety of reasons, the most important of which relate firstly to the importance attached in the exhibit to the cross-border dimension and intangible dimension of religion, which is the core question of my research. Secondly, its approach that showed religious similarities and differences in a respectful discourse, and thirdly its success in juxtaposing objects of different religions without sowing discord and evoking ongoing religious issues in Tunisia (identities, separation, and conflict).

All these factors together led me to focus my research on this exposure being a first in Tunisian museums that dealt differently with the religious heritage, giving primary importance to immaterial dimension of religion as a vital complementary dimension of religious heritage. The distinctive feature of this exhibition is the various enrichment that it acquires in each country in terms of tradition, signs, and worship. This itinerant exhibition lands each year in different countries (France, Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey), and therefore the content changes and evolves according to the religious customs of the hosting country. The singularity of having each time a new concept and a scenario rewritten and improved adds a new dimension to its museology, museography, and spiritual dimension.<sup>730</sup> In Tunisia, "*Holy Shared Places*" provided a different vision of religious behaviours, highlighted the concepts of exchange and sharing between the religious communities, and demonstrated their differences too. It is an ode to religious coexistence since it carries a message of peace, tolerance, solidarity, calls for

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<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

concord between religions, and rejects extremist dogmatic interpretations of religious texts. This exhibit is a response to the terror attack in the Bardo Museum and to every ideological rigidity that refuses ethnic and religious differences and generates exclusion and an inward-looking attitude.

In Tunisia, the scenario of the exhibit has been recomposed to suit Tunisian religious heritage and available artifacts; it has largely relied on loans from other Tunisian museums and lending from France and Italy. The exposure took place in the Bardo Museum for two reasons: a practical reason that guarantee a high number of visitors, being the most visited museum in Tunisia, and for a symbolic reason aiming to achieve international reconciliation with public morality after the terror attack on March 18, 2015. Pènicaud claims that they had not been aware of the event's political dimension and had been surprised to see the Tunisian presidency commission and French victims' families on the day of the inauguration.<sup>731</sup> He stressed that it has been a big mistake to mix paying tributes with an exposure addressing religion since the ceremony has highlighted more the victims than the exhibition itself. Given the political instability in Tunisia, curators took a measured approach to address religion and took heed of Tunisian collective imaginary, social, and religious consciousness.<sup>732</sup> Nevertheless, the highlights and key messages of the exposure have been very clear: even if each has his beliefs, writings, rituals, and saints, still there are meeting points and holy places shared by faithful of different faiths.<sup>733</sup>

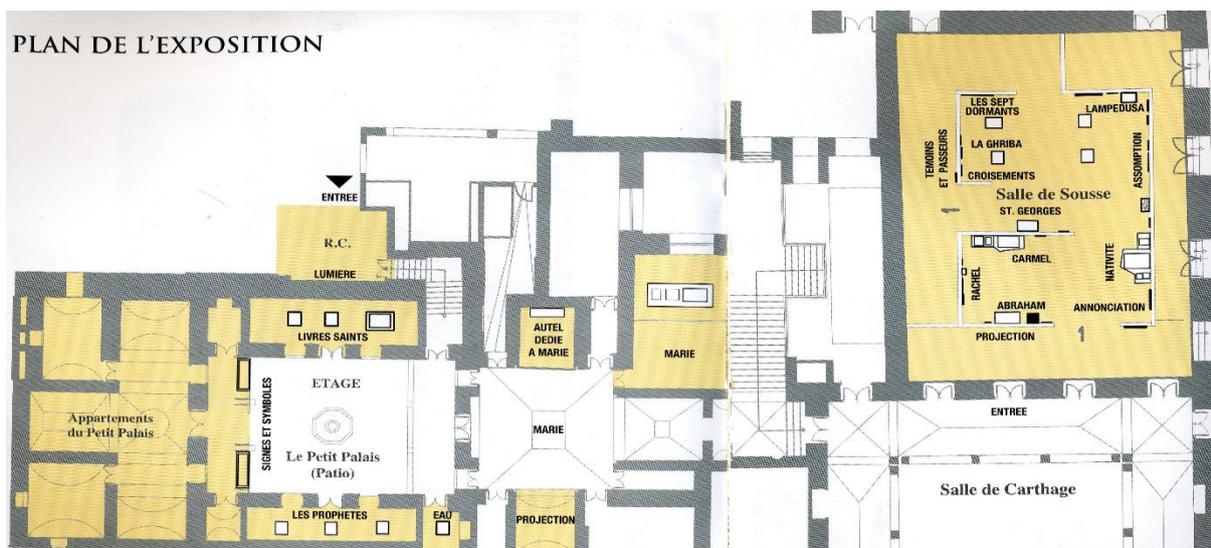


Figure 16 Plan and museological work thematic. In « Lieux saint partagés exposition »

<sup>731</sup> Ibid

<sup>732</sup> Manoel Penicaud, Dionigi Albera: Anthropologist and director of research in CNRS, Isabelle Marquette: Heritage curator in MuCem and Nejib Ben Lazreg: Senior Research Fellow in IMP in Tunisia

<sup>733</sup> Bahri, F. & Chougnnet, J. F. (2016) *Avant-propos*, in *Lieux saint partagés*, p. 9.

As illustrated above, the exposure has been staged as follows: The Sousse Hall has been the best-equipped showroom in terms of museographic support (video projection, juxtaposed objects, diversity of content sculptures, religious paintings, testimony, and photographs). It has addressed the sharing of holy places and the interfaith hospitality in the Mediterranean with a focus on Tunisia and represented Abraham in monotheistic iconography. The main hall displayed the Virgin Mary and the Marian worship in Christian Africa, and the little palace exhibited holy books, prophets, prophylactics signs, and themes of water and light in monotheistic religions.

This exhibition is of significant importance for my fieldwork in two ways: first, because it represents the first museological attempt that exhibited side-by-side religious objects of different confessions and has unusually addressed religion's differences as well. Secondly, it provides a unique opportunity to reach an opinion on visitors' perception to religious memory, plural identity, and common spiritual living shared in Tunisia. Through this survey, I will test whether this visitor-oriented approach, which spotlights the immaterial dimension of religious heritage, brings to the fore the sacredness aspect, and explore the ambiguities of religious expressions, has been effective with the Tunisian audience. Moreover, whether these new museographical and scenographic tools facilitated the understanding of religious and spiritual aspects embedded in objects. Through empirical data, I will analyse the impact of addressing subjects of much discussion, review visitors' reactions, and list their remarks and recommendation in order to refine my proposal.

#### **1.3. Survey Methodology**

It should be clear that broaching the issue of religion in a society more or less conservative remains a sensitive subject rarely discussed openly. In Tunisia, religion is considered a personnel matter and it is uncommon to discuss or reveal religious affiliation, especially since disclosing sympathies with other faiths can be misunderstood given the society's Arab tenets and Islamic religious and cultural principles. Under the pretext of prompting secularity and protecting country stability from extremism, the State's practices has been the major cause of this religious withdrawing that made citizens frightened to openly discuss and practice religion. Before the revolution, there were few sociologists who dealt with religious movements and issues, however, after 2011, social movement took another turn marked by a chaotic changing character. Indeed, several sociologists have stressed that querying Tunisians about their religious belonging or degree of religiosity represents a wide obstacle of communication in

sociological surveys.<sup>734</sup> For this very reason, the survey will not enter directly into the significant part but start with a museographical layer as a key to gaining the visitor's trust, avoid a right-of-way refusal, misapprehension, or shock while asking about religious belonging. However, it remains to be said that research conditions became more suitable in post-revolutionary Tunisia and religion conveniently started to be reflected without any political or administrative reprisals. I believe that the socio-political change that Tunisia experienced in the last decade has enabled the interviewees to reveal opinions, religious experiences and convictions, and even religious conversion without any fear.

Conducting a survey is extremely convoluted in Tunisian museums since addressing visitors represents a delicate matter that must go through different procedures to get permissions from the museum, the National Institute of Heritage, and the Ministry of Culture. There is no doubt that the issue becomes more complicated when it comes to religion, convictions, and querying personal views. Largely for this reason, I had to be present during my survey to introduce my research, explain questions, and thus reassure visitors because physical presence represents a key element to build confidence with the audience. Furthermore, this presence enabled me to observe visitors' aptitudes, identify preferred itineraries, and select successful mediation tools. In field study, the researcher becomes a key actor with a clear mission of developing understanding's factors and preparing favourable ground for visitors to complete a survey questionnaire. My function has been to ensure smooth running of the survey, assist visitors only when needed to remove any barriers of technical words. It is important to not feel as an interloper and refrain from assisting visitors during the survey setting, however, it is strictly forbidden to interfere in their answers so as not to influence their choice in order to decrease the margin of error.

My questionnaire contains different queries that assess temporary exposure's epistemological, museological, and museographical dimension with a focus on perceived quality and value needed to build satisfaction. The survey questionnaire shed light on religion as an exhibition component in Tunisian museums and more importantly on a science-based assessment of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*". I will list below the set of questions that visitors responded to, then develop research assumption, survey model, and lastly draw the statistical conclusions related to variables' impact.

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<sup>734</sup> Saidani, M (2013, August) *Tunisian Sociology after the Revolution*. University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia, Volume 3, Issue 4, retrieved on 29.09.2016 from <http://isa-global-dialogue.net/>.

- The first set of questions aim at identifying visitors' attitude: reason for visit, visit's condition, attendance average, and degree of interest in exhibitions dealing with religion.
- The second set of questions is a socio-demographic to gather an overall picture of surveyed visitors: gender, age, education level, religious belonging, profession, income, and number of children.
- The third set of questions assess first the perceived quality of "Shared Holy Places", and in a second step the perceived quality of the museum itself.
- The fourth set of questions assess visitors' perceived value toward both temporary exhibition and museum.
- The fifth set of questions reflect upon visitors' satisfaction and concept acceptance.
- The sixth set of questions examine the effectiveness of the employed approach and its impact on building loyalty.
- The seventh set of questions query the effectiveness of museums of religion in developing religious knowledge.
- The eighth set of questions inquire on the importance of immaterial heritage and objects' sacredness in museum work.
- The ninth set of questions reflect the feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia
- The tenth set of questions inquire on the religious tolerance and coexistence in Tunisian culture.
- The last box has been conceived for visitors' remarks and critiques.

#### 1.4. Objective of the Empirical Framework

In a proper empirical research, the gathered data remains of paramount importance to unpack assumptions and come to grips with research problems. For R. Boure, gathered answers can greatly assist in understanding public's specificities and it remains impressive what one can conclude by properly analysing this data.<sup>735</sup> My research focuses on using visitors' responses as a valuation method to perform displaying religion in museums, test the relevance of exhibiting immaterial aspects of religious heritage for the public, but more importantly to identify key factors leading to successfully conceive a museum that suits the Tunisian profile.

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<sup>735</sup> Boure, R. (1997). *Les sciences de l'information et de la communication au risque de l'expertise?* Sur et sous des pratiques scientifiques. Réseaux. Communication-Technologie-Société, 15 (82), p. 233-253.

It will allow me to have a more accurate picture of visitors' prior knowledge, perspective, and criticisms toward addressing religion in museums, evaluate their interest in such exposure, and shed light on their preferences, disinclinations, and indifferences in terms of religious artifacts. Indeed, the results drawn from this survey would enable me in a second phase to come up with a better solution to improve displaying, circulation, and creating welcoming facilities, promote traditional ways of learning, knowledge transference within museums, and find the best way possible to assist visitors in understanding religious exhibition. Regarding the basis on visitors' recommendations, feedback, and assessments, I will be able to adjust appropriate communication and museographical techniques to suit the Tunisians' profile in terms of labelling, mediating aid, objects' categorization, and itineraries in order to enhance objects' reading and visit's consistency and easiness. Identifying the crucial points and gaps in the exposure from the visitors' point of view would help me to locate conceptual errors and understand how to solve them, promote museum-quality standards and enhance receptivity of disseminated knowledge. This survey represents a formative evaluation conceived to reflect needed steps to follow in order to succeed a conception of a museum of religion.

Theatrical resources became a basic feature of religious exposure vocabulary, and museography's theory became a key vector in activating religious display and contextualizing religious objects in museums. In this survey, I will reflect how religion has been displayed in "*Shared Holy Places*" and try to give rise to reliable statistical censuses adapted to visitors' religious sensitivity and prior vision entrenched in the collective mind in order to adjust a conception that suits visitors' flexibility-degree in terms of religion. I consider that the quest for visitors' ergonomic becomes indispensable to fit a targeted policy in terms of broadening the means and scope of transmission of knowledge in different religious contexts. The focus of my research is to establish appropriate conditions and proper measures needed to better the understanding of immaterial dimensions of religious heritage and to especially avoid misinterpretation or outright refusal. Therefore, I will examine the relevance of the approach used by "Mucem", aiming at deepening reflection and awareness regarding ethnic and religious differences and its impact on Tunisian visitors. On the basis on my survey outcomes, I will review if proposed itineraries, museographic improvement, and use of advance equipment such as audiovisuals and interactive manipulations have been a powerful act of communication able to enhance visitors' interpretation to religious art or have been disruptive factors that distracted visitors.

It is necessary to point out that the exposure “*Shared Holy Places*” has been placed in showrooms that already exhibit wall mosaics, which forced scenographers to rely on “White Cube-scenography” to highlight objects’ sacredness and religious and spiritual aspects. Through white neutrality, non-existence of decoration, soft and subtle light, the “*White Cube*” scenography puts particular emphasis on religious objects, isolates them from an external environment, and puts visitors in a condition of contemplation. Therefore, the lived-experience morphed into a part of the scenario in which visitors have received the impact of religious artifacts on a subconscious level. It should be recalled in this context that this approach often neutralizes and unifies the exhibition’s space to favour the objects’ reading, which often makes visitors lose their spatial and temporal references caused by space abstraction and silence. For this reason, the scenographer of “*Shared Holy Places*” made use of an advanced vision and forward-looking approach to prevent falling into the trap of silence, a silence that B. O’Doherty called a “sacred tomb”.<sup>736</sup> More significantly, Curators relied on animated projection not just to get out of the grip of a contemplative space and create emotion to captive visitors, but also to compensate for the lack of religious objects given the difficulty of materializing an intangible subject.<sup>737</sup> My research will explore:

- If the active fictional experience based on a motional narrative sequence (video projection, lighting effects, and sound dramatization) succeeded in boosting visitors’ interpretative skills and enabled them to build subconsciously links with religious objects.
- If the narrative sequences provided a proper religious synopsis, enhanced the appreciation of common heritage, and boosted reflection on religious questions and contraposed prejudices.
- If the religious produced-emotion was able to defuse a symbolic entity, help visitors understand objects’ significance, and engaged their interest in immaterial aspects of religion.

Based on the survey outcomes, I will assess the effectiveness of the approach taken in “*Shared Holy Places*” that moves away to a certain extent the focus from objects’ material dimension used in most Tunisian museums and puts it on “sacred” and spiritual dimensions of objects, practices, rites, and places of worship. I will check if calling into question visitors’ religious

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<sup>736</sup> A critical appellation of Brian O’Doherty for the “White cube” scenographic techniques. O’Doherty, B., Falguières, P., & Vasseur, C. (2008). *White cube: l’espace de la galerie et son idéologie*. JRP-Ringier, p. 20-35.

<sup>737</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

“*unculture*” and challenging the fear of addressing sensitive topics has been an influencing factor in modelling visitors’ appreciation of the exhibition. Displaying religious beliefs, practices, customs, and rites in their similarities and differences and reconstituting an intangible heritage unfamiliar to the public is a complex process requiring challenging tasks to refine visitors’ understanding of religious phenomena and to improve recognition of otherness in a predominantly Muslim society suffering from religious “*unculture*” and xenophobia. Henceforth, a question arises: did curators succeed in finding an adaptive approach and accurate dose of familiarization capable of overcoming visitors’ fear, conviction, and spectrum of compromising religious identity and did they accept to be acquainted with others’ beliefs? I will check if calling to question visitors’ religious “*unculture*” and challenging the fear of addressing sensitive topics has been an influencing factor in modelling visitors’ appreciation of the exhibition. Then I will reflect on how to hone visitors’ satisfaction in religious exhibits and boost their interest in getting familiar with religious art. Identifying the critical factors to maintain visitors’ interest in religious themes and lengthen visit durations shall be among the priorities of this research.

The major target of my research will be to understand how to successfully materialize religious immateriality and spirituality in a museum of religion and to find a balanced view that takes heed of the importance of improving the perceived quality, interactivity, and playful learning activities without scarifying objects’ substance and significance and falling into a triviality trap. Based on a comprehensive analysis of museum’s perceived quality and perceived value, I will underscore the empirical determinants of visitors’ satisfaction and identify elements with significant impacts on building trust and on familiarizing the public with religious exposure.

#### 1.5. The Research Hypotheses

Unlike short-term encounter spaces such as offices or public areas in which customers spend a short amount of time and thus assess establishment’s perceived quality based on intangible elements such as empathy and reliability,<sup>738</sup> museums are a privileged long-term space of encounter that draws on three important principles: visual, spatial, and narrative dimensions achieved in in three successive stages as follow formulation, output, and visit.<sup>739</sup> For this very reason the perceived quality becomes more significant in museology and gives a long time span that fosters visitors’ intention on specific details of the scenario’s basic component such as colours, sounds, materials, forms, and decorative elements. Thence, visitors pay attention to

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<sup>738</sup> Cowell, D. W. (1984). *The marketing of services*. London: Heinemann, p. 235.

<sup>739</sup> Davallon, J. (1992). *Le musée est-il vraiment un média?* Culture & Musées, 2 (1), p. 99-101.

every detail that reinforces or weakens the visual environment and reactivate their memory to critical ends. This unintentional reflection has meaningful impact on the comprehensive assessment of the concept and takes heed of museographic potential used to assist visitors in the exhibiting areas to provide proper explanations of objects, create emotion, and enhance visit conditions.<sup>740</sup> My hypothesis is that exhibition's scenario, atmosphere, space management, mediation technique, and diversifying display devices highly condition visitors' perception of immaterial dimension of religious objects, goes beyond the historical meaning, and facilitates the assimilation of profound religious significance. By taking into account audiences' specificities, requirements, unforeseen circumstances, and constraints, it is possible to predict visitors' behaviours, model itineraries, and adjust important parameters to suit visitors' preference in terms of religious exposure. In my view, Tunisian visitors' comprehensive assessment for the visual environment include a critical appraisal of space management, objects' display, and facilities' services. In my research, the visual inspection audited three specific dimensions:

- Museum's atmosphere: advanced version of a "White cube" scenography: colours, lighting, labelling, mediation techniques, and cleanliness
- Museum's architectural dimension: decoration, spatial planning, information, and orientation signage and accessories.
- Museum's social dimension: presence, assistance, and behaviours of staff in contact with visitors (mediators/guide)

It should be pointed out that the more the focus is put on improving the perceived quality in museums, the better visitors' satisfaction can be reached.<sup>741</sup> In concrete terms, all visit's natural, artificial, and social conditions are presently manageable in the framework of "new museology" to provide interaction between visitors and exhibits and thus conditioning their emotional, cognitive, and physiological state. Thus, I suggest that outperforming the condition of the visit will no doubt prop up visitors' acceptance of exposures addressing sensitive topics, which remains a key driver in conceiving a museum of religion. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research these hypotheses:

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<sup>740</sup> Belhassine, O. (June 2004) *Identité visuelle et concepts commerciaux*. Archibat, n°8, p. 62-63.

<sup>741</sup> Johnson, P. (1995). *Cultural economics and museum behaviour: a comment*. Scottish Journal of Political Economy, 42 (4), p. 465-466.

- **Hypothesis 1: In a museum of religion, improving perceived quality and ergonomic is a key vector to boosting visitors' perceived value.**

In order to optimize exhibition's museography and visitors' ergonomics, a few evaluations have to be done before opening to the public to test the consistency of the scenario, better adapt the themes to the audience, and assess suitable combinations of display.<sup>742</sup> In the last two decades, scenographers focused on improving visitors' ergonomics in terms of objects' placement, lighting, and display models by keeping their views in movement to avoid providing fixed perceptions of the exhibits. I consider that the same principle applies for religious exposure too, since ensuring a proper space arrangement and correct ergonomics reveals the embedded value of exhibited items, fosters greater interaction, and overcomes boredom, which is a risk factor of dissatisfaction. When facing objects, a dialogical process occurs to shape the visitor's gaze by means of a scenographic eye-catcher, this mechanism crosses both the curators' intentions and the visitor's interpretative experience.<sup>743</sup> In "*Shared Holy Places*", several processes have been established to enhance the perceived quality and subsequently upgrade the experience gained in the exposure: conceptual process (materials, style, and technique), visual quality (space, colour, light, composition), and the socio-religious context (didactic, religious, ethnographic aims).

**The perceived quality:** is the tangible production composed of material and emotional element such as logistical support, ease of understanding, awareness and assistance, and physical elements of museology, museography, scenography, and ergonomics that better the sensitive dimension of the encounter with objects. Thus, improving this encounter with objects would add serenity, calm, and seduction to the visit by offering visitors a feeling of harmony and emotion.<sup>744</sup>

**The perceived value:** is an in-depth assessment of visitors for advantages, benefits, and drawbacks of efforts made by the museum to meet their expectation. It should be recalled, in this respect, that some scenarios may displease the public, not because of trivial content but rather because curators failed to highlight the value of the exhibit and attract visitors' curiosity and interest. It often occurs that visitors do not know how to see objects, read meaning, and

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<sup>742</sup> Lockett, C. (1991). *Ten years of exhibit evaluation at the royal Ontario museum (198-1990)*. A journal of visitor behavior, 2(1), p. 19-46.

<sup>743</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, E., Moussouri, T., Howthorne, E., & Riley, R. (2001). *Visitors' interpretive strategies at Wolverhampton Art Gallery* (No. 1). Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, and University of Leicester, p. 1-49.

<sup>744</sup> Dewey, J. (2010). *L'art comme expérience*, Paris, Coll. Folio Essais, Gallimard, p. 10-35.

distil the essential elements of exposures, for that reason; museums should provide them with assistance to develop understanding skills and encourage their critical appraisal.<sup>745</sup>

In religious exposure, visitors take heed of defining factors such as accessibility, information, pertinence, ergonomics, and give greater prominence to physical and mental strain to acquire knowledge. Against this background alone, they may express dissatisfaction in cases of apparent discrepancies of the exhibits, difficulties of comprehension, unfriendliness with terms and labels, and switchback itineraries that generate a sense of loss and frustration. Thus, in a religious exposure, I suggest that if the visitor mobilizes his internal (prior knowledge) and external resources (mediation support) and fails to understand items' meaning and interpret properly objects' significance, his satisfaction will undoubtedly reduce. It is then necessary to improve ergonomic and perceived quality to boost visitors' perceived value. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

- **Hypothesis 2: In a museum of religions, bettering visitors' perceived value guarantee satisfaction.**

In museums, measuring visitors' satisfaction is strictly linked to the significance level of key conditions rolled out to improve the perceived value. In this process, the quality of service plays a crucial role in assuring an effective functioning of proposed activities and in conditioning the overall satisfaction.<sup>746</sup> This assessment draws on an "expectancy-disconfirmation Paradigm"<sup>747</sup> in which the visit ends up with a confirmation (satisfaction), a positive disconfirmation (more or less), or a negative disconfirmation (dissatisfaction). In Tunisian context, visitors expect a different approach to religion, often addressed from a historical perspective, and need further information about intangible aspects of religious heritage and advanced techniques of mediation to be acquainted with different sets of beliefs. The approach should provide a large scale of creativity to develop ethical, philosophical, and religious reflection to an audience unaccustomed to intangible religious cultures other than its own. In addition, it is worth noting that one of the key factors of the perceived value remains the visit's price, which represents an essential underpinning in conditioning visitors' satisfaction. Generally, this process involves a comparison between the product value and the provided services on one hand and the

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<sup>745</sup> Goodman, N. (1996). *L'Art en théorie et en action*, trad, par J. P. Cometti et R. Pouivet, Paris, Éditions de l'Éclat, p. 98-116.

<sup>746</sup> Reichheld, F. F., & Teal, T. (1996). *The loyalty effect: The hidden force behind growth, profits and lasting*. Harvard Business School Publications, Boston, p. 41-52.

<sup>747</sup> Is an approach to measure satisfaction that proposes a comparison between expectations and ongoing experience in order to provide accurate evaluation: confirmation, positive disconfirmation, or negative disconfirmation? Oliver, R. L. (1980). *A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions*. Journal of marketing research, 17(4), p. 462.

investment cost undertaken by the person on the other.<sup>748</sup> Even if the price ratio represents a significant variable in the visit assessment, it is not the only relevant factor acting on the perceived value. It requires an effective complementarity with winning factors to condition visitors' emotions and behaviours. That is to say; improving these conditions in a museum of religion would better the perceived value and consequently guarantee satisfaction. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

- **Hypothesis 3: In a museum of religion, ensuring overall satisfaction is a key factor to convey a religious message and guarantee acceptance.**

To address a religious theme through an exhibition, the attention should be focused on finding ways to overcome culture and technical terms barriers, provide the right condition to stimulate interest in religion, and make the visitors more receptive to the message. I suggest that providing the audience with suitable conditions to receive knowledge has a strategic significance in facilitating the assimilation of unfamiliar information but more importantly, encourages curators to dig deeper and display more challenging and thoughtful issues with regard to religion. Making sure that visitors' expectations and quality standards are met ensures a richer understanding of constructed messages embodied in exhibition scenarios since it fosters visitors' sensory and analytic activity facing the objects. The latter phenomenon takes the form of two separate activities: a sensory activity very close to the object and corresponds to the way of seeing, perceiving the artifact, and experiencing its significance based on an emotional observation, whereas the analytic activity keeps the object at a distance, categorizes, and objectifies it while comparing it to another reference.<sup>749</sup> This distance enables visitors to be more objective and critical and helps them sharpen perception and broaden interpretation by associating objects with other fields of knowledge.<sup>750</sup> That is to say, curators working on religion should find ways to help visitors exercise sensory and analytic activities in an idyllic setting and thus providing satisfactory conditions to foster opportunities for learning and experience for religious phenomena. This process exerts a direct influence on visitors' understanding and acceptance of the concept. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

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<sup>748</sup> Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). *Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence*. Journal of marketing, 52 (3), p. 20-22.

<sup>749</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris: Bibliothèque des idées, p. 300-531.

<sup>750</sup> Tisseron, S. (2005). *Réalité de l'expérience de fiction*. L'Homme, 175-176(3), p. 130-142.

- **Hypothesis 4: In Tunisia, adopting a balanced, coherent, and innovative approach to religion would attract a wider public and increase loyalty.**

Visiting a religious exhibition should not be reduced to a passive itinerary and silence contemplation confined in a historic or archaeological standpoint but should rather provide an enriching experience that draws its dynamism from an advanced and efficient approach that places visitors in an utterly immersive and unconventional interactive journey. This process boosts learning, helps advantage skills into religious areas, and increases capacity to understand the meanings of objects. In other words, it is not possible to simply adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to religion with the Tunisian public since its conservatism, vision, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and prior knowledge with this topic is different. Even if Tunisia has made steady progress in modernizing the society, there is a cultural and religious conservatism still present in public consciousness. Therefore, it would be more appropriate not to adopt a daring approach to avoid offending the public's religious conviction, still with a view to open minds and instil others' acceptance and religious tolerance but in no case use a fearful and tiresome approach that would trivialize the religious issues and jeopardize the work's effectiveness. In 2012, the exhibition "*Printemps des Arts*" gave rise to much discontent in a large segment of the population that regard it as a violation on Islam, prophet, and God.

In addition, it should be noted that the archaeological and history museums displaying religious object are not frequently visited from local audiences for two mains reasons: firstly because of some mistaken abstract or immutable concept that displays inanimate objects with unchanging reference and secondly because of the sacristy of temporary exposures that give a new impetus to the collections. After a few visits, visitors realize that there is no change in the way objects are displayed and thus loose interest and therefore waive a future visit. This inexcusable managing failure generates often negative publicity through word of mouth and discourages further visits to the museum. Several studies as those of F.F. Reichheld have shown that acquiring a new customer is more costly than a customer retention, which is applied likewise to museums.<sup>751</sup> In concrete terms, a successful exhibition can have a powerful impact on museums' reputation; improve its image and perception by audience in terms of quality and innovation, and increase attendance by intensifying the cultural consumption habits.<sup>752</sup> Has it been the case in "*Shared Holy Places*"? How effective has it been to adopt a balanced, coherent,

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<sup>751</sup> Reichheld & Teal 1996, p. 85-98.

<sup>752</sup> Rhee, B. (2003). *The study on museum visit as culture consumption*. Journal of Arts Management, 3, p. 98-102.

and innovative approach in attracting a new slice of public by offering new sensory perceptions of religion? Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

- **Hypothesis 5: In Tunisia, a museum of religion would be an effective solution to develop visitors' religious knowledge.**

In the Muslim world, Tunisia has been one of the few countries that has escaped the rise of fundamentalism and ideological violence since all religious practices are totally supervised by the State.<sup>753</sup> For fear of religious movement and mainly Islamism, the State put forward a doctrine that discriminates against religious practitioners (Islamist), religious converts, ethnic minorities, and lawyers and journalists defending the rights of these citizens. This oppressive policy has made the religion a taboo subject, frightening people and excluding this issue from media, schools, universities, and museums. Therefore, religious material and immaterial heritage has been covered by forgetfulness, progressively disappeared from recreation centres and cultural venues, and consequently objects of religious character have been damaged or lost due to a patrimonial irresponsibility and illicit trafficking of religious artifacts particularly of Jewish nature highly sold for their authenticity. Accordingly, this policy has created a situation of religious "*unculture*" in which individuals became unaware entities submitting to a religion traced by the State. As a result, for this repression, religion became a spontaneous phenomenon occurring without culture that individuals personalized in function of situation and aspiration. More dangerously, a large section of the Tunisian youth fell easily into the trap of radicalization because of an ignorance of the fundamental principles of religion.

The most serious error committed in Tunisian museums is focusing on exhibiting ancient pagan religions due to the richness of its legacy and not giving enough consideration to the considerable religious demographic, ethnic, and cultural changes that society had undergone after the antic period. I strongly believe that a museum of religion would be an appropriate short-term solution and a way out of this identity crisis and fight against ignorance about religious differences and concerns. Such a museum should recognize religion's spiritual and religious dimensions underestimated in most museum works, admit secularization and social modernization and freedom of belief, and accept criticism to religion. As a long term solution, Tunisia has to deploy more effort to highlight its enormous potential in terms of tangible and intangible religious heritage needed to fight the absence of religious values of the prevailing

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<sup>753</sup>Ben Achour 2000, p 96.

"religious unculture" and gain citizens' compassion, particularly students and schoolchildren that have an important role to play in the future of the country.<sup>754</sup> Approaches on religion need to be rethought and revised (content and methodology) in museums, schools, and universities. Museums have to be a benchmark of affirmation and identity questioning to different people, including individuals who tend to exclude this relationship.<sup>755</sup> Even more important, religious exposure should be brought outdoors to audiences as part of an open-air museum mechanism and propose an unusual experience that decentralizes exhibitions in the territory. It is worth noting that this process will not be effective without ensuring a strengthened long-term cooperation between museums, schools, and universities.

**Museum-School Partnership:** is a huge unexploited potential in Tunisia since most schoolchildren carry out their first visit to a museum rather late, generally with a school group toward the end of the primary cycle. It should however be pointed out that these early experiences are a crucial element of learning that helps pupils shape their favourable or unfavourable attitudes toward museums.<sup>756</sup> For the minister of education, these informative actions in terms of cultural and religious diversity need to be taken at an early age to make difference matter less and improve community life.<sup>757</sup> Early childhood is considered the most important developmental phase of knowledge, which is a suitable period to inject through museums ideas of religious tolerance, acceptance, and bound schoolchildren with others cultures. Indeed, a sustained contact with museums allows schoolchildren to foster their learning in a more reflective manner and incrementally improve their proficiency.<sup>758</sup> Nonetheless, a study of Sigma Conseil showed that 36% of interviewed secondary teachers have organized visits to a museum, which is very few. In return, 90 % of them have shown a growing willingness to co-operate with museums in a new cultural outreach program.<sup>759</sup> Tunisian museums are not encouraging such cooperation due to a lack of funding streams that hinder the finance of this process capable of developing deeper integrated relationships and agreements with schools. I believe that a museum of religion should foster partnership with schools to give more interest in religion in formal and informal settings.

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<sup>754</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul.

<sup>755</sup> Rat-Morris, V. (2007, September). *Développement Culturel et Valorisation des Patrimoines*. Concept et rôles d'un musée d'histoire locale, p. 78.

<sup>756</sup> Harrison, M., & Naef, B. (1985). *Toward a partnership: Developing the museum-school relationship*. The Journal of Museum Education, 10(4), p. 9-12.

<sup>757</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul.

<sup>758</sup> Greenhill, E. H. (2007). *Inspiration, identity, learning: The value of museums*, University of Leicester, p. 20.

<sup>759</sup> Sigma Coseil survey (2014, August) *Le tunisien entre musée et école : en savoir plus*. retrieved on 01.10.2016 from <http://www.sigma.tn/>

**Museum-University Partnership:** a trust relationship should be set up between museums and universities because of the several obvious gaps and deficiencies that inhibit mutual cultural activities. This cooperation is limited to the fact that students need museums in their practical training to complete their formation in several fields like archaeology, history, museology, anthropology, sociology, and design. The crucial missing component is the work-linked training between museums and universities that helps students develop the necessary skills needed in museum work. As regarding religion in this binary association, I personally consider that the problem lies in the under-representation of religious phenomena in both institutions, which are commonly defined according to state guidance.

After the revolution, I believe it is relevant and timely that a museum of religion sees the light of day to remove ignorance of one's religion and that of others. This lack of religious knowledge is certainly one of the main sources of ongoing religious, social, and ethnic abuses occurring in Tunisia. State policy has sought to suppress all religious visibility in the name of secularity, yet secularity guarantees the free exercise of worship, without distinction or discrimination. Even if a better knowledge of religion gathered in a museum of religion would not solve, once and for all, the identity issue and boost the acceptance rate in Tunisia, it would certainly help Tunisians to better understand other beliefs and worship. It would create bridges of interaction with communities, which is a good start to cut down misunderstandings caused by “*religious unculture*”. In Tunisia, a museum of religion would be an effective solution to develop visitors’ religious knowledge. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

- **Hypothesis 6: The immaterial religious heritage is an enormous untapped potential and objects’ intangible value is not being flagged in Tunisian museums**

Tunisia has a very rich immaterial heritage attached to places of remembrance, religious customs, and beliefs. Nonetheless, the country is undergoing an irretrievable loss of this national legacy and collective identity, especially with the dilution of several religious customs and traditions in view of the increasing trivialization of Christian and Jewish religious inheritance. Indeed, archaeological and history museums in Tunisia tend to interpret the intangible religious heritage exclusively as a function of tangible inheritance and not as a specific type of heritage existing in its own right. This conception error has given lifeless exhibitions in which religious objects freeze in showcases, losing their context, intelligibility, and performative aspects due to flawed approaches that hinder religious items from acting,

narrating, and signifying. In the absence of a systematic or analogue museography, Tunisian exposures have failed in making religious objects understandable, meaningful, and appreciable to the public. For Paine, even if some religious objects took different forms and turned to historical artifacts, art objects, or field of research, a certain class of people still consider them 'religious objects' and even 'sacred objects'.<sup>760</sup> I therefore argue that museums' secularity should not necessarily eradicate the objects' spiritual dimension and wipe sacredness out, as in the case in most Tunisian museums. The objects' intangible value, sacredness, and the spirituality behind practices should be spotlighted more in religious exposures, and curators should have greater freedom of action to get out of this hindering aesthetic and historical bubble.

Besides its primary function of preserving, a museum should be a forum for ethic and religion in order to arise a successful cultural model that respects the needs of future generations.<sup>761</sup> Therefore, Tunisian museums should raise awareness, engage the public in its religious past, mediate objects' spiritual dimensions, and explain the unseen aspects of religion without giving a concrete religious experience or orientation in order to respect visitors in their belief or non-belief. This cannot be done without altering this reductive perspective, acknowledging objects' spiritual dimension, and adopting new ways of displaying to help visitors understand religious properties' meaning and significance, and interpret the sacredness at their convenience. In this context, it is important to specify that the "sacred" is not an abstract concept since everything in this world could be deemed as a religious or sacred object.<sup>762</sup> Thus, when it comes to displaying of religious objects, the value of items exceed the physical or material perspective (utilitarian value) and require the setting of expression of spirituality and sacredness. The intangible dimension of religion should be given opportunity to appear in museums given its intrinsic worth since traditions and practices underpin an intangible heritage value, and mainly to minimize the risk of its disappearing. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

- **Hypothesis 7: When made properly, the project of a museum of religion in Tunisia has a great chance of success**

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<sup>760</sup> Paine, C. (2015, August). *Religion in secular museums: is a revolution starting?* Mapping the Dynamics of Religion in Exhibitions of European Museums for the History of Religion: Theories and Practice .Retrieved on 04.10.2016 from <http://www.iahr2015.org/>.

<sup>761</sup> Rein, A. (2011). *Sacred ritual or profane "event „culture? How can ritual objects and performances in museums be shown with integrity?* Museum aktuell, p. 25.

<sup>762</sup> Kohl, K. H. (2004). *Jedes Ding kann Machtträger sein*. In Bräunlein Religion & Museum, p. 7.

A museum is an essential testimonial holder needed in every society to ensure knowledge's accessibility and to assist in the interpretation of phenomena, which require a well-thought-out approach consistent with ethics and international laws.<sup>763</sup> To this end, concept, approach, and criticism should be carried out in respect for communities of origin and their religious and cultural practices. To be effective, a museum of religion needs to gain the trust of the public and that is being done by diligently dealing with religious objects deemed "sensitive" and by maintaining artifacts' sacredness and value through a preferential treatment in accordance with the beliefs of the religious and ethnic communities. My project will involve partnerships between different religious communities in Tunisia without any exclusion or distinction with the aim of defending a common goal: provide the right for all religions and backgrounds to appear and work together in the museum, upholding the culture of life, sharing, dialogue, and religious freedom.

For decades, the dictatorship kept religion out of critical examination in museums; however, the ongoing transition to democracy reiterated Tunisia's religious diversity and informed the public of what lay hidden for years. I am convinced that exhibiting religious diversity, examining religious conviction, and reflecting on religious identity is no longer a disturbing element or an issue of dispute in Tunisia. By observing visitors and giving attention to their reactions and attitudes toward the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*", I noticed an overall satisfaction with the concept and a general acceptance without reserve to its two-pronged approach that displayed reproductions of collective memory, popular imagination, and spirituality without neglecting objects' aesthetic dimension. A museum of religion can be a centre of multifaceted activities anchored in Tunisian plural society that became after the revolution an Arab model in terms of personal and collective freedom. This museum should not fear to address daring religious issues and provide a trite concept; contrariwise, the approach should be courageous, with moderation and compromise. Moreover, it should consider the public's unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge in terms of religious otherness caused by the State's policy of concealment and foster the understanding of own religious beliefs and practices and those of others. Indeed, when made properly, the project of a museum of religion in Tunisia has a great chance of success. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

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<sup>763</sup>Boylan & Woollard 2006, p. 10.

- **Hypothesis 8: In Tunisia, it is a question of “structure tolerance” rather than a religious coexistence, and a museum of religion may positively influence this attitude**

It should be clearly stated that religion produces a kind of basic religious chauvinism because of universal human vulnerability.<sup>764</sup> Unlike polytheistic cultures, Jan Assman considers that monotheistic religions can be deciphered from a distinction of a new violence generated by a bad composition between religion and politics.<sup>765</sup> For Edith Franke, nowadays it is widespread to witness a vivid religious landscape all over the world, commonly formed by a majority of one or two dominant religions and other religious orientation groups and systems constituting a religious minority.<sup>766</sup> This is the case in Tunisia, with a vast majority of Sunni Muslims in which Christianity constitutes the second largest faith that branches out to different sects, including Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholicism, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, and Anglicans. It should be emphasized that the members of these religious minority are commonly those of European blood living in most urban areas.<sup>767</sup> Judaism comes next as the third largest minority, meanwhile Bahaism, agnosticism, and atheism grow in importance. In Tunisia, Christian churches and Jewish synagogues are alongside mosques, providing to each religious community the opportunity to freely practice their religious worship. The issue here is if it is possible to speak of a religious coexistence in Tunisia or it is only a form of a “structure tolerance”.<sup>768</sup>

The Tunisian Constitution supports the tolerance, ensures the inviolability of the human person, guarantees freedom of conscience, and protects freedom of worship. It states, “*The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalisation. The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir and the incitement of violence*

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<sup>764</sup> Gross, R. M. (1999). *Religious diversity: Some implications for monotheism*. Crosscurrents, p. 349-366.

<sup>765</sup> Assmann, J. (2011) *Moïse l'égyptien : Un essai d'histoire de la mémoire*, broché, Trad, Laure Bernardi, p.10-90.

<sup>766</sup> Pye, M. (Ed.) & al. (2006) *Religious Harmony: Problems, Practice, and Education: Proceedings of the Regional Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions*. Religion and Reason, Walter de Gruyter & Co, p. 64.

<sup>767</sup> International Religious Freedom Report (2011) United States Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Section I. Religious Demography, p. 2.

<sup>768</sup> Is a form of recognition without reconciliation given the majority's attachment to its irreducible identity. It respects human dignity but does not involve a reconciliation deemed as an erasure of identity. Zarka, Y. C., & Fleury, C. (2004). *Difficile tolérance*, Paris, PUF, p. 5.

*and hatred*".<sup>769</sup> This tolerant and liberal approach to religion has been strengthened with the report of the Committee on Individual Freedoms and Equality, which represents a revolution in the field of human rights and individual freedoms. This committee called for amending all articles based on religious segregation, called for protection of different beliefs, and upheld the right not to have a religion or a belief. Although religion generally plays a significant role in individuals' identity construction process, in Tunisia, the concept of citizenship has gone beyond religion in the socio-cultural influence and collective identity construction. In a study "religion and politics" carried out by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in the countries of northern Africa (1000 surveyed per country), the people surveyed in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Egypt put forward their religion before their citizenship, except in Tunisia 53.2% of respondents felt Tunisian before Muslim.<sup>770</sup> The fight for religious tolerance is growing day by day in Tunisia that promotes a culture of democracy and religious tolerance but has not yet attained a real religious coexistence.

I am convinced that a museum of religion is able to start a new discourse between religious communities and spread the culture of coexistence. Thus, based on previous studies, I establish in my research this hypothesis.

#### 1.6. The Survey's Structure

The final questionnaire will be composed of 79 general questions divided as follows:

- 7 questions of general information
- 7 questions regarding sociodemographic variables
- 14 questions regarding perceived quality
- 9 questions regarding visitor's perceived value
- 8 questions regarding visitor's satisfaction and concept's acceptance
- 6 questions regarding the employed approach and its impact on building loyalty
- 6 questions regarding the effectiveness of the museum of religion in developing religious knowledge
- 7 questions regarding immaterial religious heritage and objects' sacredness in museums
- 7 questions regarding the feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion

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<sup>769</sup> Tunisia's Constitution of 2014, Freedom of opinion/thought/conscience, Freedom of religion Article 6.

<sup>770</sup> Sigma Coseil survey (2016, Mai) *Présentation des résultats des enquêtes par sondage en Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Libye Egypte Religion et politique en Afrique du Nord*, p 6, retrieved on 09.10.2018 from: [www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_45134-1522-3-30.pdf?160510132356](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_45134-1522-3-30.pdf?160510132356).

- 7 questions regarding religious coexistence in Tunisia and tolerance degree with respect to religious minorities
- One question for visitors' remarks and critiques.

All the questions have been written in Arabic using a plain language to be easily understood by an uninformed public.

#### 1.7. Methodological Choice

In this part, I will present the variable's operational definitions as well as the questionnaire structure. Thereafter I will introduce the target audience, the sampling, and data collection, to end up with the analytical methods used in my research. Generally, data collection can be carried out in two different ways: the qualitative approach in which the nature of the research is usually exploratory insofar as the subject matter is little studied in the past and the quantitative approach which is the case of my study in which similar research problems have already been studied previously. For many researchers, quantitative research means the study of suitable large, selected samples, whereas qualitative research often focuses on a few cases, if not one case.<sup>771</sup> The choice of one approach over another is conditioned by several factors, including the nature of the research, field of study, time, and budget allocated to the survey. In museum surveys, there are two possible research objectives: a descriptive survey whose essential function is to describe a situation and respond to a need for information and a causal survey in the form of an experimentation that seeks to identify the cause of an observed phenomenon.<sup>772</sup> In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between the two approaches in descriptive surveys in museum work: a cross-sectional method (my case of study) to provide an image of a situation at a given moment (temporary exhibition: *Shared Holy Places*) and longitudinal study which consists of conducting a survey periodically.

My research will be carried out in a quantitative way insofar as it seeks to provide unexplored quantified data to tackle religion in Tunisian museums. I opted for a quantitative method and a "hypothetico-deductive" approach for the obvious reason that there is recognized theoretical framework in literature that explored my research topic.<sup>773</sup> Relying on literature review, I developed a model of eight hypotheses that I submitted to an empirical test (300 visitors) in the

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<sup>771</sup> Yin, R.K. (1991). *Case study research. Design and methods* (2e Ed.). Newbury Park, Sage, p. 1-94.

<sup>772</sup> Vilatte, J. C. (2017, february) *Méthodologie de l'enquête par questionnaire*, Laboratoire Culture & Communication Université d'Avignon, p.6. retrieved on 11.10.2018 from : jcvilatte-le-questionnaire-jcv.pdf.

<sup>773</sup> The hypothetico-deductive approach consists of hypothesizing, collecting data, testing the obtained results obtained to confirm or refute hypotheses. Mesly, O. (2015). *Creating models in psychological research*. Springer.

course of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*". In this context, the application of this approach will put into practice various tools to compile data by bestowing a questionnaire to a number of respondents in order to carry out an assessment while using the "latent variables"<sup>774</sup> that are not directly observed but rather inferred through a mathematical model. In the estimation of a given variable, the collection of a sample always presents a risk insofar as the researcher can later discover in the research that the sample could be considered either too small or too large. This implies that the determination of the sample size should be made with precision, all the more since the survey's statistical validity and the collected information accuracy is more related to the sample's absolute size than the ratio of the sample size or the ratio of the total population studied (sampling rate). Quantitative research may seem an easy process for assessment and verification; however, it is far from being the case since it requires a lot of work and time, particularly regarding the choice of methods of analysis.<sup>775</sup>

Moreover, the available budget, often considered as a constraint of weight, determines the choice of the sample size. Because of these arguments, and given temporal, economic, and practical limits, I chose a sample size in order to obtain results that would ensure a proper representation of the basic population. For the processing of the collected data, I opted for the statistical software "SPSS 10.0" which allows carrying out the statistical tests necessary for the validation of the proposed hypotheses. In the next section, I will introduce the descriptive statistics of the variables, the scale's reliability tests of these variables, and the factor analyses necessary to provide suitable interpretations of the results.

#### 1.8. Variable's Operational Definition

- **The perceived quality:**

To measure the perceived quality, I made use of 14 measurement items related to the museum's facilities, sonography, and museography techniques and equipment used to display religious objects' accessibility and convenience. The measurement scales in the questionnaire are of type "Likert" made up of five points in which "5" means "very satisfied", "1" means "totally unsatisfied".

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<sup>774</sup>Borsboom, D., Mellenbergh, G. J., & Van Heerden, J. (2003). *The theoretical status of latent variables*. *Psychological review*, 110 (2), p. 203.

<sup>775</sup> Giordano, Y., & Jolibert, A. (2016). *Pourquoi je préfère la recherche quantitative/Pourquoi je préfère la recherche qualitative*. *Revue internationale PME*, 29(2), p. 7-9.

- **The perceived value:**

For measuring the perceived value, I opted to use nine items that quiz the religious, hedonic, aesthetic, economic, and cognitive stimulation during the visit. I based my measurement items on previous research conducted by Yves Evrard and Philippe Aurier in “Identification and validation of the components of the person-object relationship”.<sup>776</sup> The measurement scales in the questionnaire are of type “Likert” made up of five points in which “5” means “strongly agree” and “1” means “definitely disagree”.

- **Visitors’ satisfaction and concept’s acceptance:**

For measuring visitors’ satisfaction and their acceptance to the concept, I based my work on Richard Oliver’s two-dimensional conceptualization of satisfaction.<sup>777</sup> Thus, I quizzed visitor’s “need fulfilment” and evaluated the emotion produced in the exhibition “*Shared Holy Places*”. I explored how the need fulfilment could be related to the exhibit concept in terms of guaranteeing audience acceptance. Based on previous study reviewing the satisfaction measurement entitled “*A Reexamination of the Determinants of Consumer Satisfaction*”,<sup>778</sup> and consumption emotions entitled “*Measuring Emotions in the Consumption Experience*”,<sup>779</sup> I opted to use nine items that quiz the exposure (labelling, signage, architecture, admission, exposure consistency, services and accessibility) and visitor’s emotions (contentment, peace, pleasure, surprise, or rejection). The measurement scales in the questionnaire are of type “Likert” made up of five points in which “5” means “very good” and “1” means “very mediocre”.

- **Employed approach and its impact on building loyalty:**

For measuring the approach effectiveness and its impact on building loyalty, it is important to establish a contentment analysis in terms of enjoyment by evaluating the revisiting intentions of visitors. This assessment explores visitors’ approval to the approach, audacity, methodology, and prettiness and check if curators managed to build a retention. Based on the study of Garbarino and Johnson, I made use of six measurement items to query required elements to enhance a long-term loyalty.<sup>780</sup> The measurement scales of the questionnaire are of type

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<sup>776</sup> Evrard, Y., & Aurier, P. (1996). *Identification and validation of the components of the person-object relationship*. *Journal of business research*, 37(2), p. 127-134.

<sup>777</sup> Oliver 1997.

<sup>778</sup> Spreng, R. A., MacKenzie, S. B., & Olshavsky, R. W. (1996). *A reexamination of the determinants of consumer satisfaction*. *Journal of marketing*, 60 (3), p.15-32.

<sup>779</sup> Richins, M. L. (1997). *Measuring emotions in the consumption experience*. *Journal of consumer research*, 24 (2), p. 127-146.

<sup>780</sup> Garbarino, E., & Johnson, M. S. (1999). *The different roles of satisfaction, trust, and commitment in customer relationships*. *Journal of marketing*, 63 (2), p. 70-87.

"Likert" made up of five points in which "5" means, "strongly agree" and "1" means "definitely disagree".

- **The effectiveness of a museum of religion in developing visitors' religious knowledge:**

For measuring the effectiveness of a museum of religion in developing visitors' religious knowledge, I made use of six measurement items to assess the pertinence of such a project in enhancing audience awareness and improving their knowledge in terms of religion. I based my work on the study of Gumbrecht and Ulrich "*The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*" to explore how museums could create a social change and a sustainable growth based in a constantly changing and inter-connected environment.<sup>781</sup> The measurement scales of the questionnaire are of type "Likert" made up of five points in which "5" means "certainly" and "1" means "certainly not".

- **The importance of displaying immaterial religious heritage and objects' sacredness in Tunisian museums:**

For measuring the untapped potential of immaterial religious heritage in Tunisian museums and how sacredness is not being flagged in exhibitions, I made use of seven measurement items to assess the level of relevance of tackling religion in museums and curators' level of implication to preserve objects' sacredness. I based my research on Crispin Paine's works "*Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion*" and "*Religious Objects in Museums Private Lives and Public Duties*" to explore norms, methods, and measurement techniques needed to maintain objects' sacredness without emptying them completely from their original values, symbolisms, and significances.<sup>782</sup> The measurement scales of the questionnaire are of type "Likert" made up of seven points where "5" means "very good" and "1" means "very mediocre".

- **The feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia:**

For measuring the feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia, I made use of seven measurement items to establish an analysis tool to evaluate project feasibility and risk of failure. I based my research on the work of Mollard and Le bon "*L'art de concevoir et gérer un musée*" to better understand the research issue, elaborate a proper scientific and cultural project, define its orientations and strategies, and analyse the interactions (collections, the public, and environment of the future museum).<sup>783</sup> The measurement scales of the

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<sup>781</sup> Gumbrecht, H. U. (2004). *Production of presence: What meaning cannot convey*. Stanford University Press, p. 17-25.

<sup>782</sup> Paine 2000; Paine 2013.

<sup>783</sup> Mollard, C., Le Bon, L., Deldicque, M., Molins, S., Montagne, L., Azoulay, A., & Lang, J. (2016). *L'art de concevoir et gérer un musée*. Éditions Le Moniteur, p. 10-304.

questionnaire are of type "Likert" made up of seven items where "5" means "certainly", and "1" means "certainly not".

- **The religious coexistence in Tunisia:**

For measuring the tolerance degree of the surveyed and assess the democratic culture needed to launch a museum of religion in Tunisia, I made use of seven measurement items to evaluate the dialogue, balance, peace, and tolerance in furtherance of reflection democracy and reconciliation with religious minorities in Tunisian. I based my work on Oissila Saaidia's work entitled "*From a faith to another, the case of Islam*"<sup>784</sup> to explore tolerance and acceptance of religious otherness. The measurement scales of the questionnaire are of type "Likert" made up of seven items where "5" means "certainly", and "1" means "not at all".

### 1.9. Questionnaire Structure

In accordance with previous studies, the structure of the survey will be the following:

Content	Measuring variable	Number of Questions	Type of Measurement Scale
<b>General Information</b>	The objective of the visit, annual frequency of visits, number of revisits, companion, membership	7	Nominal scale
<b>Sociodemographic Variable</b>	Gender, age, religion, education, occupation, income, number of children	7	Nominal scale
<b>Perceived Quality</b>	Equipment, concept, staff, services, exhibit, environment, accessibility, additional events	14	Likert scale
<b>Perceived Value</b>	Aesthetic value, hedonic value, style, economic value, social practice value, status value, cognitive stimulation value	9	Likert scale
<b>Visitors' Satisfaction and Concept's Acceptance</b>	Performance assessment in respect to visitor's expectation and prior knowledge, recognition of the concept, and emotion	8	Likert scale

<sup>784</sup> Saaïdia, O. (2013). *D'une croyance à l'autre, le cas de l'islam*. Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses, (4), p. 9-14.

<b>Employed Approach and its Impact on Building Loyalty</b>	Approach approval, emotional balance, bold creativity, positive advertising, recommendation possibility or revisiting the exposure	6	Likert scale
<b>The Effectiveness of a Museum of Religion in Developing Visitors' Religious Knowledge</b>	Relation importance between individuals and the museum, museum and academics institution cooperation, significance of a museum of religion in developing religious knowledge	6	Likert scale
<b>The Religious Heritage and Objects' Sacredness in Tunisian Museums</b>	Degree of priority of religion in museums, assessment of religious exhibits in museums, sacredness and spirituality, interaction with objects	7	Likert scale
<b>The Feasibility and the Chance Of Success of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia</b>	Practicability of the project, potential for success originality of the idea, mission, nature of museum and work strategies	7	Likert scale
<b>The Religious Coexistence in Tunisia</b>	Nature of the organizational culture in Tunisia, cultural diversity and tolerance levels in respect to religious otherness, religious conversion, and participation of religious minorities in social and political life	7	Likert scale
<b>Perspective and Expectation</b>	Remarks, observations, views, arguments, notes, and reflections	1	-

*Table 4. The structure of the survey*

## 2. Exploratory Analysis of the Empirical Data

In this section, I will examine the statistical characteristics of the sample based on a simple sorting applied to the variables reflecting visitors' gender, age, and socio-professional category and professional experience. I will begin with a descriptive analysis to draw visitors' profile by compiling and classifying the obtained quantitative data while indicating surveyed characteristics and the statistical and functional links that relate to the studied components. In the second part, I will analyse the reliability of the scales of measurement used in my study and then introduce the results of the descriptive analysis to determine the characteristics of the sample. The exploratory analysis ends up with the implementation of a principal component analysis in order to determine the factorial axes and to analyse the variance of each concept.

After one day of pre-test to assess the adequacy and efficiency of my survey, I established a minimum age of 16 years old for the surveyed to ensure seriousness of the responses. Moreover, the respondents have been chosen arbitrarily with the condition to be Tunisian in order to ensure objectivity and minimize the risk of error since it is one of the purposes of the present research

aim at providing a profile information on Tunisian visitors and assess their perception toward religious exposure. I estimate that the average time to fill the questionnaire is 15 minutes, which is an acceptable length in relation to the relevance of the subject. The total number of surveyed visitors has been 356, in which 25 visitors have been surveyed on the first day to adjust the questionnaire in term of accuracy, form, and length, and 31 incomplete questionnaires have been suspended during answers sorting.

## 2.1 Descriptive Analysis by Simple Sorting: The Characteristics of the Sample:

### 2.1.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Surveyed

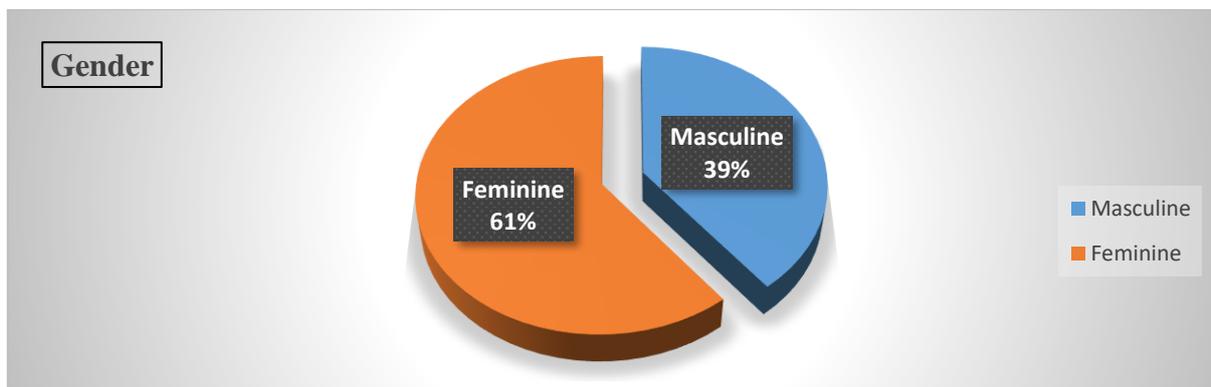


Figure 17 Diagram of surveyed visitors' gender

As illustrated in the chart above that describes the gender variable, the proportion of women, 60.7%, exceeds widely that of men, 39.3%, which requires a cross-referenced interpretation. Usually, museum surveys seldom show a 20% difference between the proportion of men and women which leads to the next question: what is the reason for this variation? The reversal of ratio numbers of women over number of men reflect the feminization of Tunisian society and the strengthening of their participation in economic and social life. Even if Tunisia is considered a pioneer in women's empowerment in the Arab world, women are still struggling to be more powerful and effective in the society. The probability that a girl enrolled in the first year of primary school completes her secondary school cycle is estimated at 41.8%, while for a boy the probability is limited to 23.1%.<sup>785</sup> Consequently, In 2013/2014, 67% of graduates in higher education have been women, since school dropout is much higher for men than for women.<sup>786</sup> The importance of women steadily grows and takes precedence over men in certain fields such as art, culture, and politics.

<sup>785</sup>Institut National de la Statistique (2015) *Rapport national genre Tunisie*, p 12 retrieved on 12.10.2018 from: [www.ins.tn/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/rapport%20national%20genre%20Site%20\\_0.pdf](http://www.ins.tn/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/rapport%20national%20genre%20Site%20_0.pdf).

<sup>786</sup> Ibid

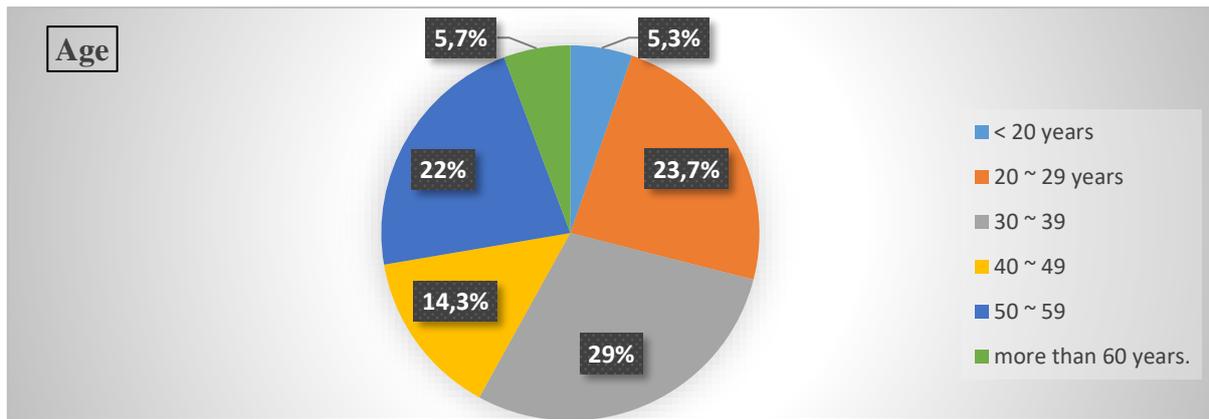


Figure 18 Diagram of surveyed visitors' age

Visitors have various identities, skills, and abilities and therefore operate differently depending on their personal status, needs, age, and mood. Generally, museums are primarily young seniors who show interest in culture.<sup>787</sup> These young seniors have two decisive factors that prompt their visits to museums: sufficient time and enough income.<sup>788</sup> In my survey, the results did not meet the observation and the age distribution was relatively homogeneous. It is therefore obvious that the overwhelming majority of the surveyed visitors were young people (57.9%) divided as follows: (5% age group < 20 years), (23.7% age group 20–29) and (29.0% age group 30–39). What is striking in the outcome is that the young seniors category (people over the age of 60, often retired or on the eve of being), exceeds the youth category <20 years. One explanation for the divergence is that besides adequate financial resources, young seniors have time to visit museums and travel easily, either alone or in groups.

Moreover, adolescents haven't been overly present in this exhibition for the simple reason that in Tunisia young people are generally reluctant to visit a museum and prefer sports activities over cultural events. Several studies have shown that young people do not voluntarily visit museums and that their visits are often carried out within the framework of two instances: school and family.<sup>789</sup> According to O'Riain H, young people reject exhibitions because of the rules, constraints, and passivity happening in museums.<sup>790</sup> This age group is characterized by several changes in individuals' character, taste, and mood, which often lead to loss of bearings, uncomfortable feelings, and uncertainty in places of knowledge such as museums due to a non-mastery of reading tools. Moreover, the young public often regard a museum as an outdated

<sup>787</sup> Kotler, N. & Kotler, P. (1998). *Museum strategy and marketing*, San Fransesco: jossey-Bass, p. 200-432.

<sup>788</sup> Poquet, G (1996). *Le pouvoir et le rôle économique des plus de 50 ans*. Paris : CREDOC, p. 80.

<sup>789</sup> Bouquillard, O. (1997). *Les musées et les jeunes: comment développer la fréquentation*. Musées et collections publiques de France, (216), p. 63-65.

<sup>790</sup> O'rian, H. (1997). *Chinks in the «Boring» Armour*. GEM News, 65, p. 10-15.

and non-dynamic institution marked by a “non-living” aspect that does not involve activity.<sup>791</sup> I believe that the theme of the exhibition played a determining role in causing this weak presence of adolescents since religion is oft deemed as a tedious and unattractive topic.

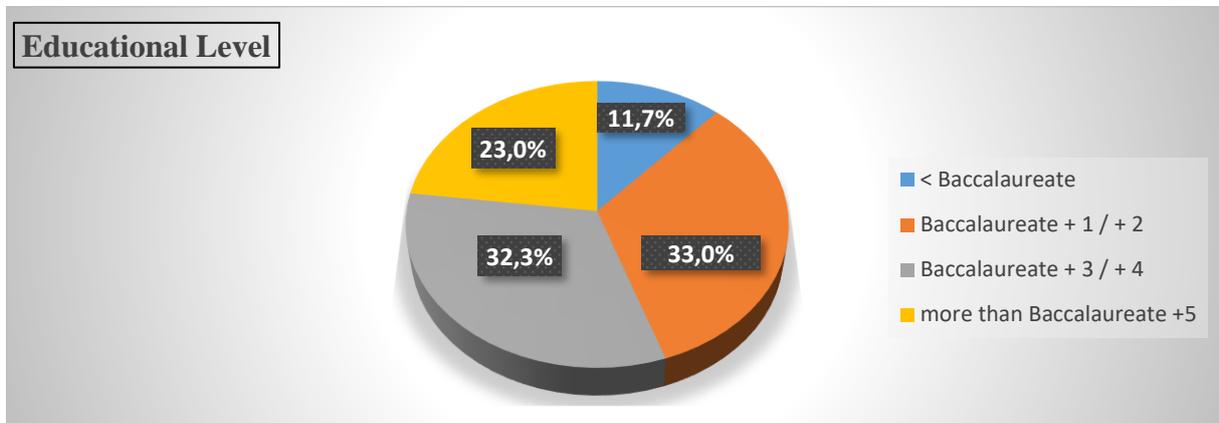


Figure 19 Diagram of surveyed visitors' educational level

Visiting a museum remains a sign of relative proximity to the cultural world of the elite who are able to understand, decode, and interpret arts. For Bourdieu, the appreciation of art is a result of training that requires cultural competence essential to build a specific social code.<sup>792</sup> Thus, the absence of this code provokes among visitors a sense of uncertainty, disruption, and chaos in museums. Therefore, this familiarity with culture explains the high average of the intellectual class in my survey since 88.3% of the surveyed passed their high school examinations. As shown in the figure above, visitors' graduation level is relatively high, 32.3% of visitors have bachelors and 23.0% have masters, which I explain with the state policy that managed to develop an education system able to produce a base of a solid human capital in order to meet the needs of a nation in perpetual evolution. I truly believe that visiting an exhibition of religious art for individuals with low education levels often leads to situations of failure in which the confrontation with objects without core knowledge lead to denial. However, it is worth noting that that in the consumption of cultural goods, the social allegiance is not the only factor playing a determining role in this categorization but also and more importantly the existence of a culture related to these activities.<sup>793</sup>

<sup>791</sup>Daignault, L. (2001). *Le passé et l'avenir des ados au Musée*. Service de la recherche et de l'évaluation, Musée de la civilisation, p. 75-78.

<sup>792</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1968). *Éléments d'une théorie sociologique de la perception esthétique*. *Revue Internationale des sciences sociales*, 10(4), p. 640-664.

<sup>793</sup> Kassarian, H. H. (1980). *Consumer esthetics: A commentary*, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 7, p. 126-128.

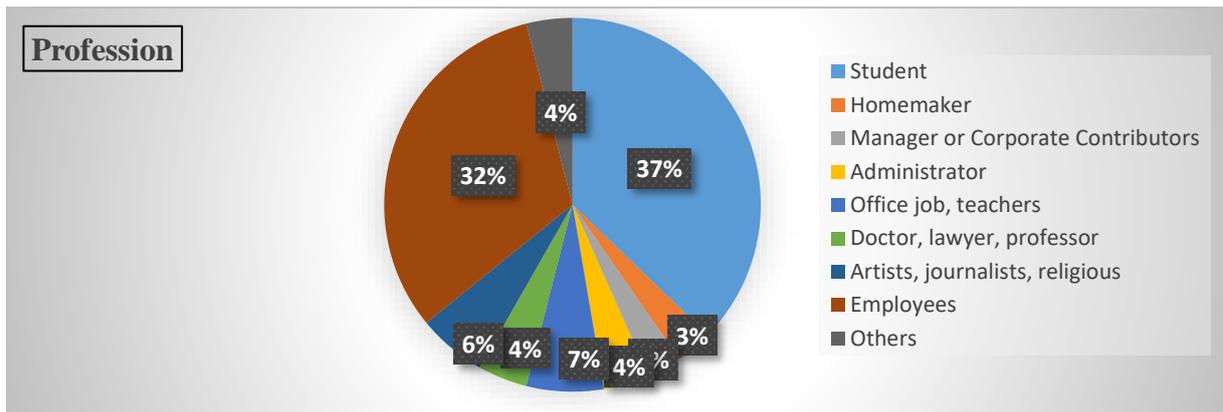


Figure 20 Diagram of surveyed visitors' profession

As illustrated in the chart above, the profession's composition of surveyed visitors is unbalanced. With the exception of two categories, other visitors' profiles are distributed fairly. Indeed, there is a glaring over-representation of students (37%) and employees (32.3%) due to State "freebie culture" and free entrance measure for students and education employees.<sup>794</sup> It is important to specify that patrimonial free-of-charge services adopted in Tunisia are even better than those in France, which is a leader in museum management.<sup>795</sup> Other explanatory elements for student overrepresentation are the practical works made within museums for students of archaeology, history, heritage, museology, art, architecture, and above all the museum's location situated between three of the largest universities in Tunis. However, for employees, the enormous number of civil servants in Tunisia can explain the percentage since only the public sector employs a large proportion of the population, precisely 8.37%, of whom 44% are women.<sup>796</sup>

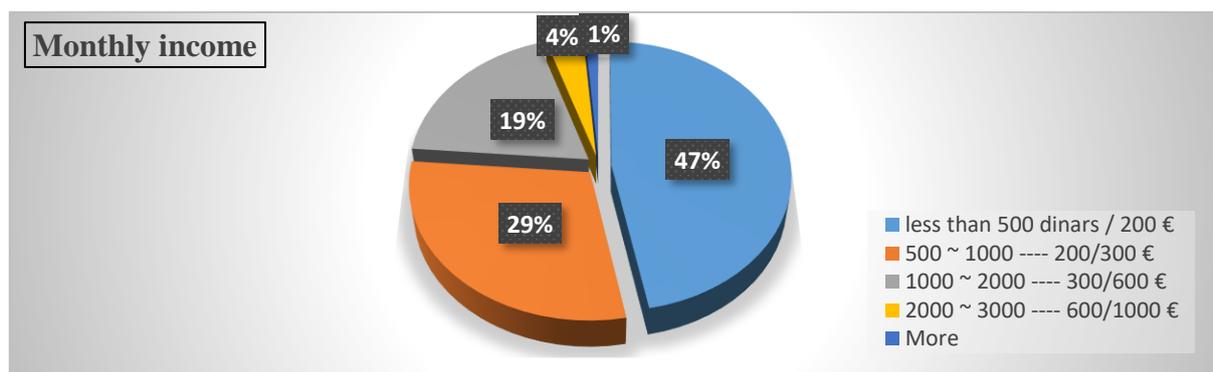


Figure 21 Diagram of surveyed visitors' monthly income

<sup>794</sup> Free of charge for public and private civil servants under the supervision of the Ministry of Scientific Research and Higher Education and the Ministry of Education.

<sup>795</sup> In France, student under the age of 25 have free access to the permanent collections of national museums and monuments and sometimes benefit from advantageous rates in other cases.

<sup>796</sup> Institut National de la Statistique, 2015.

It is striking that incomes of less than 500 dinars/200 euro per month amounted 47.0% of those surveyed, which is a very high rate. The one and only reason for this high percentage is student's high proportion, 113 students, which constituted almost half of the surveyed visitors. Indeed, students' situation should be re-examined in Tunisia since not enough is being done to encourage research and develop students' performance. Generally, students receive a scholarship ranging from 45 € per month for bachelors to 90 € per month for doctoral students.<sup>797</sup> An initial logical observation is that the middle class (income < 1000 dinars/300 euro) represents 29.3% of the surveyed visitors, since the average salary in Tunisia is based between 600 and 800 Dinars, around 250 euro. In Tunisia, the middle class comprises 1.9 million workers, 60% of whom receive a wage of less than 800 dinars per month, and 33% receive a monthly salary of less than 400 dinars.<sup>798</sup>

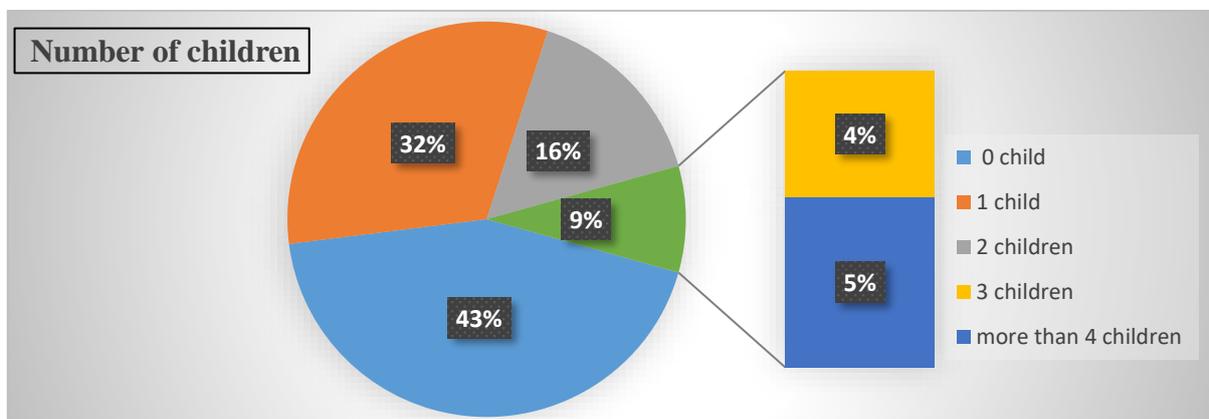


Figure 22 Diagram of surveyed visitors' number of children

As shown in the figure above, 43.7% of the interviewees have no children, which is attributable to the fact that a third of the respondents are younger than 29 years. Moreover, 37.7% of the surveyed are students, which further delays marriage and having children. But the striking finding is that 32.0% of the surveyed have one child and 15.7% have two children, which may account for the abolition of polygamy in 1957 and birth control programs made to change fertility behavior and reduce birth numbers.<sup>799</sup> A high rate that could reach 12 children was reduced in last decades to a final progeny of 2.6 children per woman for the generation born between 1947/1963. The Analysis of the results of this survey shows that from 57% of visitors having children, just 9% have three or more which means that Bourguiba's policy has achieved relative success in terms of birth control. The educational level of parents, and particularly those

<sup>797</sup> The granting of these fellowships takes into account the parents' social conditions and incomes that should not exceed 1600 euro annually.

<sup>798</sup> Statement of the Tunisian Minister of Finance (2013, December) retrieved on 04.01.2017 from: <http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/>.

<sup>799</sup> Vallin, J. (1971). *Limitation des naissances en Tunisie*. Efforts et résultats. Population, p. 189.

of mothers, has a significant impact on the likelihood of the children's attendance to museums and on their artistic taste. Several visitors noted in the box comments that they purposely brought their children to visit this religious exhibition to widen their field of vision and raise their awareness to understand that difference of religion should not be a source of conflict. This action shows a fear of an alarming misunderstanding of Islam, the surge of radicalism after the revolution, and the intolerance caused by a deficit of dialogue and understanding between religious communities.

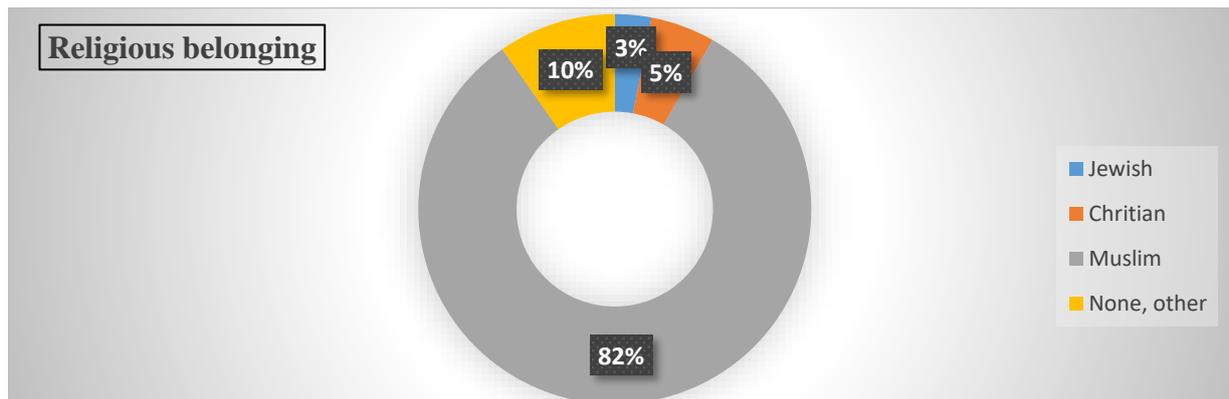


Figure 23 Diagram of surveyed visitors' religious belonging

As is shown in Figure 8, the proportion of visitors of Muslim faith is overwhelmingly dominant with 82.0%, which is quite logical given that the majority of the population is Muslim with a rate close to 98%. There remain, however, two points that need to be clarified in view of their importance: firstly, the significant weight of attendance of Christians, 5.3%, and Jewish, 3.0%, as compared to the small size to the overall population, which I think is attributable to a specific interest in religious exposure. Secondly, the high percentage of non-believers/others, 9.7%, which represents an evidence of an ongoing change in the Tunisian religious scene. After the revolution, the curtailment of religious liberty declined and, therefore, the religious commitment and non-commitment shifted, which has led to a wave of radicalization on one hand and a religious freedom movement that enabled atheists to display their non-belief in public on the other. According to a study conducted by the Gallup Institute in 2012, there is approximately 4% of atheists in Tunisia, of which 4000 are members in the Atheist Union in Tunisia - UAT.<sup>800</sup> Indeed, being able to publicly reveal a different religious adherence or non-belief is a test for democracy and the level of tolerance for a country that is undergoing a large step to achieve a real religious liberty in a predominantly Muslim population. Several concepts have begun to change in Tunisia, namely that it is not necessary to be Muslim to be Tunisian

<sup>800</sup> Témoignages : Etre athée en Tunisie, terre d'Islam (2017, March) retrieved on 16.10.2018 from <https://femmesdetunisie.com/temoignages-etere-athee-en-tunisie-terre-dislam>

or being born Muslim does not necessarily mean to remain faithful to this faith, and more importantly; atheists are not devoid of spirituality just for the fact that they rely on their intelligence instead of transcendence. These phenomena, facts, and social and religious changes deserve to be reflected, displayed, criticized, and shared with the population—and that through a museum of religion.

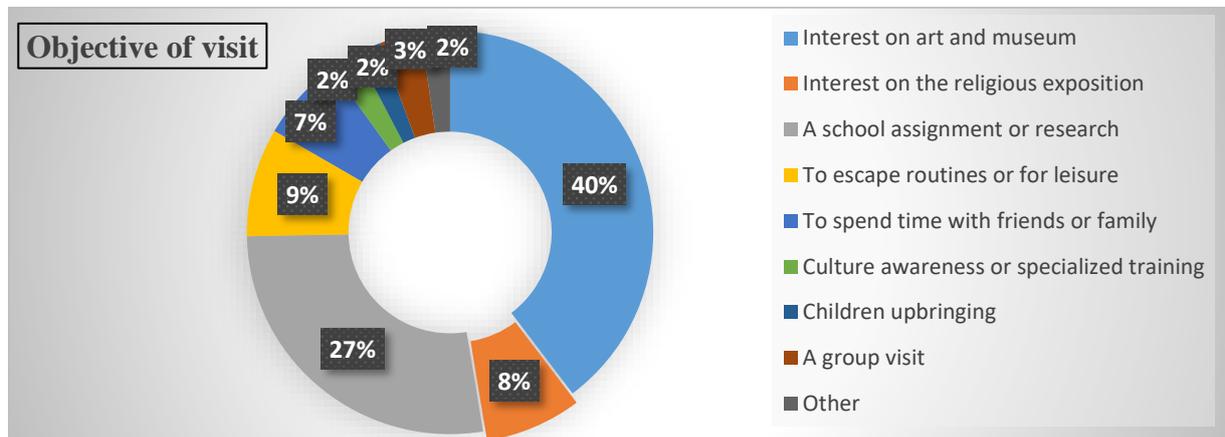


Figure 24 Diagram of surveyed visitors' objective of visit

Several research studies have shown that the two main reasons for visiting a museum are discovering fine artifacts and extending general knowledge.<sup>801</sup> This is indeed generally the case, although not always, since it is necessary to distinguish between benefits sought from the visit and the attractive features that involve visitors' experience and appeal. In real terms, visitors' engagement has a hierarchy that classify the motivation into four key drivers: Intellectual, Social, Emotional and Spiritual.<sup>802</sup> In museums, almost half of visitors are driven by a social motivation, however, in my research, the lion's share went to emotional motivation with 39.3% (interest in art and museums). Then, intellectual motivation with 31.6% (culture awareness, children upbringing, specialized training, school assignment or research), and then social motivation with 18.7% (escape routines, leisure, spend time with friends or family, group visit). This reversal reflects a characteristic feature of the profile of Tunisian visitors seeking to experience emotion (aesthetic pleasure, collective memory, cultural identity) more than social stimuli (entertainment, social interaction). It is noteworthy the spiritual motivation (interest in religious exposition) reported the lowest percentage 7.7%, but it remains certainly a good sign that even with weak marketing, 23 persons came specifically to visit the exposure “*Shared Holy Places*”. In the comment box, many visitors mentioned that they had not been informed about

<sup>801</sup> Dixon, B., Courtney, A. E., & Bailey, R. H. (1974). *The museum and the Canadian public*. Publié pour la Direction des arts et culture, Secrétariat d'État, Gouvernement du Canada, par Éditions Culturcan, p. 1-10.

<sup>802</sup> Hargreaves McIntyre, M. (2005 May) *never mind the width feel the quality*, museums and Heritage show, p .9, retrieved on 17.10.2018 from: [www.museumsandheritage.com](http://www.museumsandheritage.com).

this event and that it was unfortunate other Tunisians missed the opportunity to get a clear picture of the religious diversity and coexistence of the Mediterranean region. Indeed, the event has not gotten the attention of private media because of a political disagreement with the State's presidency chair, which is one of the main organizers of the exposure.

It should be borne in mind, however, that there is a need to improve the display techniques of religious objects by means of museographical technological advancement to create emotion and raise visitors' awareness and interest in their immaterial religious heritage. As part of my observation work, I tracked the path of ten visitors from the entrance through the showrooms to their leaving with the aim of drawing the most followed itinerary, and I realized that the little palace was the least visited part of the exhibition. The only possible explanation for this disinterest is the non-use of any digital and audiovisual, museographic support, which has confined the interactivity with the objects and, consequently, reduced the time spent in this department.

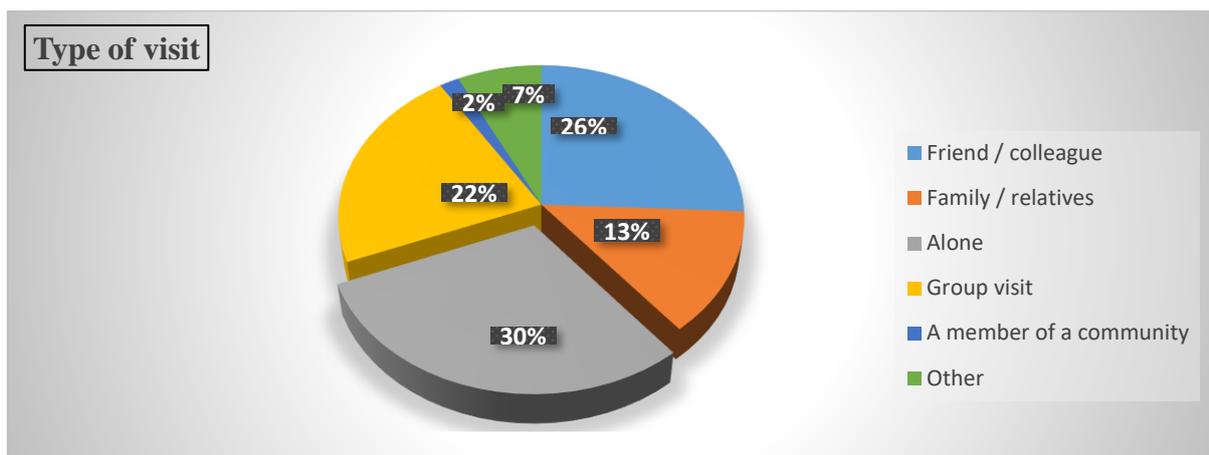


Figure 25 Diagram of surveyed visitors' type of visit

As shown in the figure above, the highest proportion of surveyed visitors came alone to the museum 30%. By scrutinizing the profile of these visitors, I noticed that they constituted two significant social classes: young seniors of privileged class with a high rate of familiarity with museums seeking appeasement, curiosity, and aesthetic beauty and students who came for research. In return, 25.7% of visitors came in a circle of friends or colleagues seeking an emotional experience and view exchange and 13.3% in a family visit in a moment of sharing, relaxation, and discovery. As part of my observation work, I noticed that the majority of visitors were moving in groups from one showroom to another but most of them isolated themselves from the group inside the showroom to make their own choice in terms of itinerary and objects. It is certainly worth emphasizing the importance of group visits as a factor of democratization

that facilitate access to museums and help to overcome the fear and cultural timidity of children and adults. Nevertheless, it is necessary to shed light on the importance of individual visits of young seniors who represent potential visitors for a museum of religion.

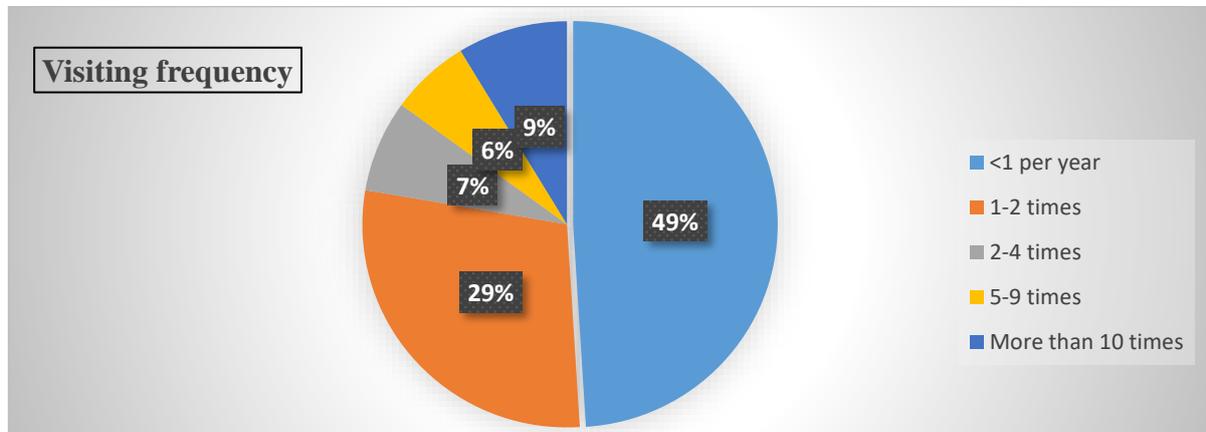


Figure 26 Diagram of surveyed visitors' visiting frequency

As illustrated in the chart above, half of the interviewed occasionally visit the Bardo Museum, which is an alarming number since it represents the most visited museum in Tunisia. This observation raises the question of whether Bardo failed in building loyalty with visitors or that from the outset Tunisians do not have the culture of visiting museums. In this context and following a thorough analysis of responses, I consider that the Tunisian policy of democratization has been partial, inappropriate, and uneven, which has not crossed all social classes and set up "a cultural arbitrariness".<sup>803</sup> The majority of museum visitors are more fortunate and educated than average as is the case in my survey (55.3% > BAC+3). Nonetheless, it is important to see the glass half full since there has been a growing prosperity to museum culture in Tunisia in the last decade; the figure shows a relative loyalty to Bardo since 51% of the surveyed visited the museum at least 1 time in 2016. Indeed, there is a positive correlation between the social class, the education level, and the frequency of visiting: the more the visitor belongs to upper social class and higher education, the more they visited Bardo in the last year (15% visited Bardo at least 4 time in 2016). It is clear from the figure that a project of a museum of religion has suitable ground to succeed with the raise in public awareness in terms of museum and cultural practices.

<sup>803</sup> Bourdieu & Darbel 1969, p. 248-250

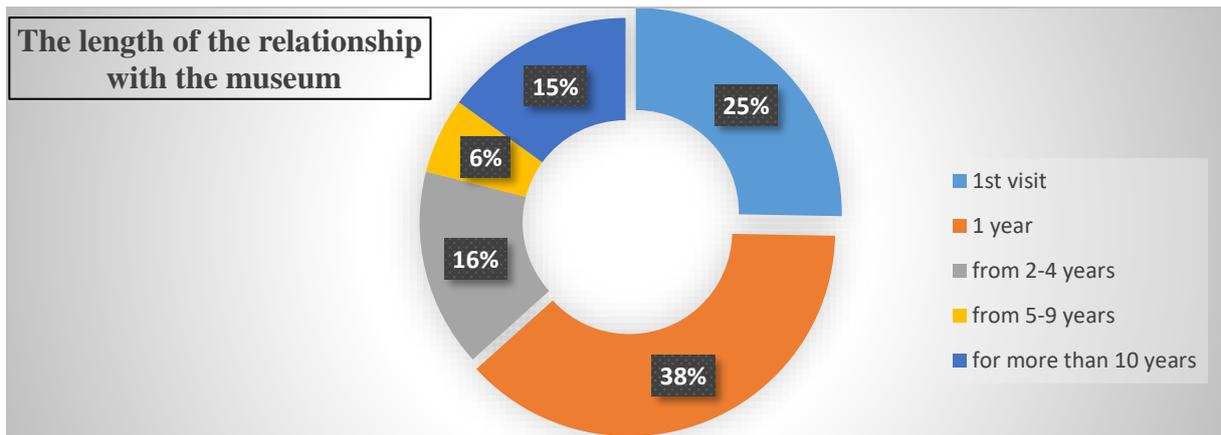


Figure 27 Diagram of surveyed visitors' length of their relationship with the museum

It is striking that the proportion of relatively new visitors with  $\leq 1$  year relationship to the museum exceeded 63.3% which means that there is a considerable visitor potential starting to be acquainted with museums, which is a positive factor for a future museum of religion. It is becoming apparent that cultural consumption and the range of museum exhibits have grown in Tunisia over the last decade, and museums are no longer deemed as a devitalized and static space but rather an emotional space of dialogue and imagination. Several factors have contributed to creating this stronger interest in museums, such as the implementation of museography in a few museums, the policy of democratization of culture, and the marketing strategy of free admission that has limited income as determining factor and discriminating variable in visiting museums. It is worth noting that the Bardo Museum has succeeded in building loyalty of a substantial proportion of the surveyed visitors (seniority of the relationship:  $2 \leq 4$ / 15.7%;  $5 \leq 9$ /6.0%;  $\leq 10$ /15.0%). Indeed, there is a significant correlation between the seniority of the relationship with the museum and visit attendances since the frequency of visits depends on the length of the linkage: the longer the seniority is, the higher the attendance is.

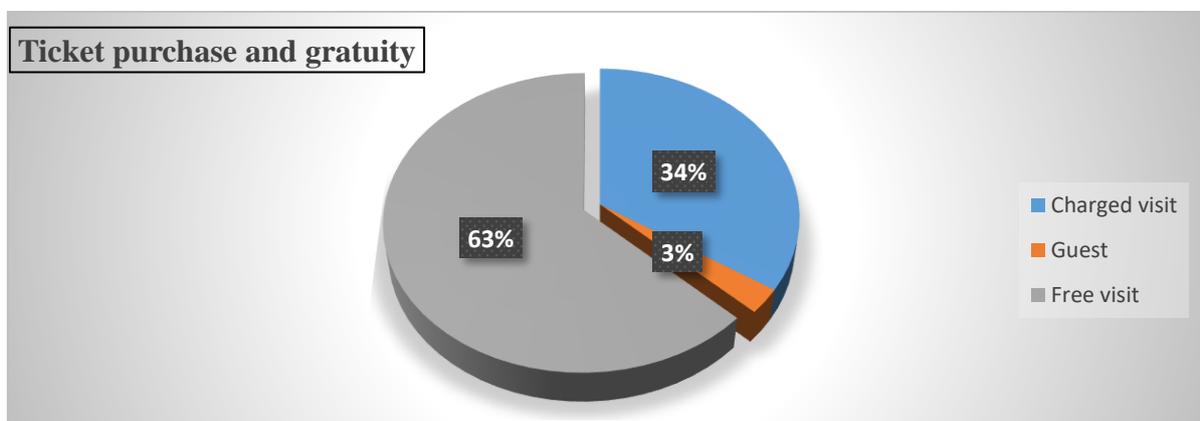


Figure 28 Diagram of entrance type (charged or free)

In the context of museums, two out of three people regard free admission as a decisive factor and a helping hand to plan a visit to a museum. As shown in chart 13, there is blatant discrepancy between free visits decreasing 63% and charged visits with an average percentage of 34.3%, which is a logical consequence of the State's "freebie culture" for the enlargement and diversification of audiences. In the category that benefited from free entrance, more than two out of three (79.3%) belongs to the middle class who earn <1000 dinars-300 euro monthly in which 59% were students. Given its high financial loss for museums, the issue of gratuitousness and need for democratization of culture remains a subject of numerous debates in museums.<sup>804</sup> However, Tunisia chooses to invest more in culture and offers free entrance to: children under 6 years old, pupils, students, teachers, handicapped persons, persons accompanying persons with disabilities, journalists, military personnel and police officers, and personnel of ICOM and ICOMOS. Moreover, it provides free entrance for everyone on the first Sunday of each month, the 18<sup>th</sup> of April (World Day for Archaeological Sites) and 18<sup>th</sup> of May (World Museum Day).

Several studies showed that motivations to visit a museum do not only depend on the price of the visit.<sup>805</sup> Indeed, even if a free entrance reduces the overall monetary cost, the activity of visiting generates other non-monetary costs (parking, food, and souvenirs) and demands two different dimensions of effort: an objective dimension (transport, visit's duration, difficulties, etc.) and a subjective dimension (risk of being disappointed from the visit).<sup>806</sup> In Bardo, tourists represent the chief source of income given their huge number and their entrance relatively expensive compared to Tunisians (three dinars of difference). Nonetheless, few visitors mentioned that they are not frequent museum visitors due to the high price of entrance that often amounts to eight dinars, adding that the reduction of entrance price to four dinars in Bardo during the restoration works in 2001 had been very reasonable. Given the low income of a large section of the population, entrance fee remains a substantial determining factor that should be taken into consideration when fixing the price of entrance to a museum of religion.

#### **Museum Membership:**

Unlike a prior knowledge of a non-existence of this marketing plan, I purposely asked this question to experience visitors' reactions that varied from exclamation, astonishment, and

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<sup>804</sup> Gombault, A., Urbain, C., Bourgeon-Renault, D., Le Gall-Ely, M., & Petr, C. (2008). *La gratuité des musées et des monuments qu'en pensent les publics en France?* Culture études, (1), p. 3.

<sup>805</sup> Bailey & Falconer 1998.

<sup>806</sup> S. Bailey & al. (1997) *Charging for admission to museums and galleries: arguments and evidence*, Museum Management and Curatorship, n° 16, p 355-369.

questioning if such an offer exists. Unlike many countries, museum memberships that form a loyal and engaged audience to museums does not exist in Tunisia. Membership and subscription could be two key factors to success in a museum of religion by bringing together members of different religious communities or members without religious affiliation to boost ideas, animation, and conference cycles. These practices are able to create a feeling of commitment to the museum and guarantee a permanent renewal of the content and resource.

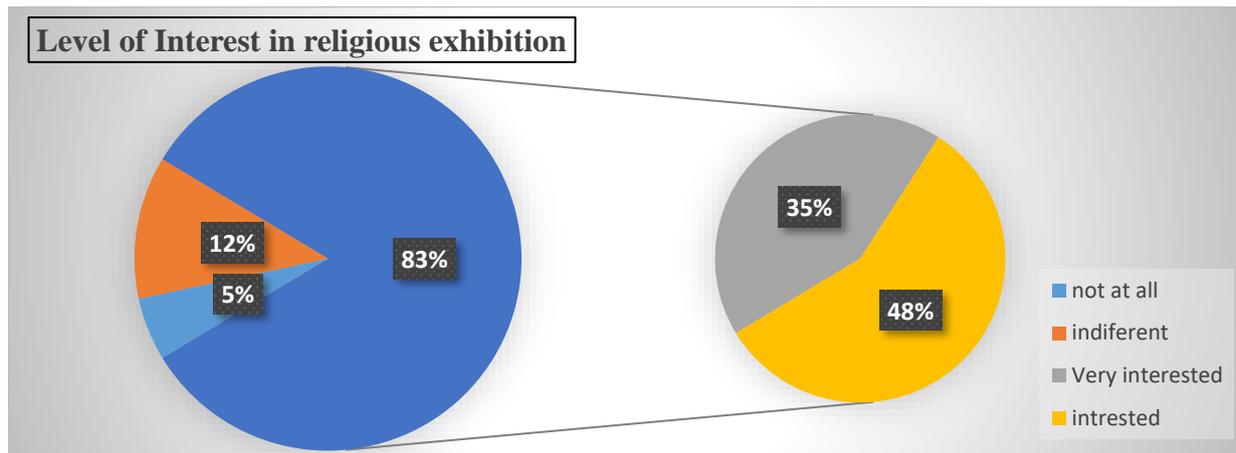


Figure 29 Diagram of surveyed visitors' level of interest in religious exhibition

As shown in the figure above, more than eight out of ten persons (82.6%) are interested in religious exhibition, which is a good sign and a relevant indicator that a museum of religion has a significant chance to draw large audiences. The exposure that brought to the fore spirituality, sacredness, belief, and custom in places of worship shared by the religious communities in the Mediterranean region acted outside the usual framework of museums of archaeology and history. The exhibition succeeded in casting doubt on some certainties and absurdities since a large section of the visitors ignored that Muslims frequented synagogues and churches to pray across 14 centuries and managed in lightening the value of Mary in Islam. Every exhibition constitutes an artifact that responds to curators' intention, transformed into instrumental and technical devices, but what matters most is to know who will be targeted by this intention.<sup>807</sup> For Pènicaud, the intention has been to promote a peaceful interreligious dialogue for a non-specialised public without levelling down in the presentation and choice of displayed works.<sup>808</sup> Curators put together paintworks, photographs, projections, visual art works, and sculptures to highlight cases of crossbreeding and interreligious sharing of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The prime intention has not been to display religion in its nature and value but rather to show

<sup>807</sup> Davallon 1999, p. 9.

<sup>808</sup> Interview with Manol Pènicaud.

likeliness, distinction, divergence, and point out what this sharing conveys while allowing believers and non-believers to make up their own minds. It will also be important to analyse the rest of the responses since 12.0% of the surveyed were indifferent toward religious exhibition and 5.3% have not been interested in this type of exposure. By Scrutinizing the response, I noticed that 38.8% (14 from 36) of the visitors indifferent toward religious exhibits had no religious or unspecified affiliation. As regarding the proportion not interested in religious exposure (5.3%), I suppose that this refusal is due to a protective aspect and a fear of this kind of exhibit deemed as an appeal to other faiths, which is able to put visitors in a position to rethink their religious belonging.

### 3. Analysis of the Reliability of the Measurement Scales

The reliability analysis allows researchers to explore the scales of measurement properties and the elements that constitute it. It helps to determine the extent to which the elements of a questionnaire are linked one to another and to provide a general index of the consistency or an internal coherence of the scale as a whole. Given that I used multiple Linkert questions in my survey, I will deploy the correlation coefficient of “*Cronbach Alpha*”<sup>809</sup> which is a measure of internal consistency to examine the reliability of the scales. This coefficient is an indicator to measure the reliability of the different items supposed to contribute to measuring a given phenomenon. Indeed, the reliability coefficient equal to or higher than 0.70 is deemed “acceptable” in social science but some authors suggest higher values of 0.90 to 0.95.<sup>810</sup>

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<sup>809</sup>Is the most widely-used single-administration test score reliability coefficient, it is deemed as the most accurate reliability coefficient. Cho, E. (2016). *Making reliability reliable: A systematic approach to reliability coefficients*. *Organizational Research Methods*, 19 (4), 651-682.

<sup>810</sup> Bland, J. M., & Altman, D. G. (1997). *Statistics notes: Cronbach's alpha*. *Bmj*, 314 (7080), p. 572.

Thus, this approach will be applied to all the continuous measurement scales of my research.

Scale	Cronbach's alpha value
<b>Perceived Quality (PQ)</b>	<b>0.986</b>
<b>Perceived Value (PV)</b>	<b>0.978</b>
<b>Visitors' satisfaction and concept's acceptance (S)</b>	<b>0.979</b>
<b>Employed approach and its impact on building loyalty (AL)</b>	<b>0.954</b>
<b>The effectiveness of a museum of religion in developing visitors' religious knowledge (EMOR)</b>	<b>0.984</b>
<b>Immaterial religious heritage and objects' sacredness in Tunisian museums (RHS)</b>	<b>0.951</b>
<b>The feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia (FOP)</b>	<b>0.959</b>
<b>Religious coexistence and tolerance degree with respect to religious minorities (RM)</b>	<b>0.972</b>

*Table 5. Reliability of the Measurement Scales*

As illustrated above, there is a high value of alpha  $< 0.9$  confirming that there is a good interrelatedness between items and that used scales are reliable. As a result, the internal consistency between the items of each concept is excellent.

#### **4. Principal Component Analysis**

Principal Component Analysis (PCA)<sup>811</sup> is a method of data analysis through which I summarized the information contained in a cross-tabulation of individuals and quantitative variables. The aim is to establish a similarity between individuals, to look for groups of homogeneous individuals, and to point out a typology of individuals. Indeed, this technique requires a large sample size to stabilize a correlation matrix, therefore 50 cases is deemed very insufficient, 100 is insufficient, 200 is fair, 300 is good, 500 is very good, and 1000 is excellent.<sup>812</sup> In this case the application of the PCA method allowed me to construct factorial axes concerning the concepts of my research. These factor axes permit to explain the variances of each concept from the items.

<sup>811</sup> Hotelling, H. (1933). *Analysis of a complex of statistical variables into principal components*. Journal of educational psychology, 24 (6), p 417–441.

<sup>812</sup> Tabachnick, B. G., Fidell, L. S., & Ullman, J. B. (2007). *Using Multivariate Statistics*. 4th Edition, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, p. 588.

**Analysis of Variance**

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Index KMO</b>	<b>explained Variance<sup>813</sup></b>	<b>Number Of axes</b>
<b>Perceived Quality (PQ)</b>	<b>0.930</b>	<b>86.245%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Perceived Value (PV)</b>	<b>0.908</b>	<b>88.017%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Visitors' satisfaction and concept's acceptance (S)</b>	<b>0.915</b>	<b>89.225%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Employed approach and its impact on building loyalty (AL)</b>	<b>0.856</b>	<b>84.110%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of a museum of religion in developing visitors' religious knowledge (EMOR)</b>	<b>0.900</b>	<b>93.394%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Immaterial religious heritage and objects' sacredness in Tunisian museums (RHS)</b>	<b>0.872</b>	<b>81.685%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia (FOP)</b>	<b>0.850</b>	<b>84.350%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Religious coexistence and tolerance degree with respect to religious minorities (RM)</b>	<b>0.841</b>	<b>86.882%</b>	<b>1</b>

*Table 6. Analysis of Variance*

Based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)<sup>814</sup> Test to measure how suited my data for Principal component analysis as illustrated in table 16, the KMO values were between 0.8 and 1, which indicate that the sampling is adequate.

**4.1. Interpretation of the Factorial Axes**

In this part, I will further address the measured items to unravel the decisive factor required for the conduct of a successful exhibition addressing religion.

<sup>813</sup> Is the ratio between the variance of that principal component and the total variance.

<sup>814</sup> Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is a measure of sampling adequacy recommended to check the case to variable ratio for the analysis being conducted. Cerny, B. A., & Kaiser, H. F. (1977). *A study of a measure of sampling adequacy for factor-analytic correlation matrices*. *Multivariate behavioral research*, 12(1), p. 43-47.

4.1.1. The Perceived Quality

Item	Factorial axe
	1
1.11. Museum comfort and ergonomics	,968
1.4. Exposition labels	,960
1.1. Atmosphere	,951
1.13. Light system	,947
1.9. Museum facilities and service	,947
1.10. Sound system	,944
1.12. Staff's courtesy and effectiveness	,940
1.14. The use of photographs and video projection	,930
1.2. Architecture	,924
1.6. Importance and usefulness of the permanent exposure	,921
1.8. Museum itinerary	,916
1.7. Importance and usefulness of the temporary exposure	,896
1.5. Originality of the exhibition	,893
1.3. Museum signs and orientation information	,859

As the values in the table above demonstrate, visitors' overall assessment has been positive with a good KMO index (0.930) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.859 (lowest value) to 0.968 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure the perceived picture quality of the museum. The component "Museum signs and orientation information" constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to "Museum comfort and ergonomics" deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which require a more comprehensive analysis.

It is now becoming increasingly clear that improving museography and ergonomics has become a prerequisite in the field of museology in the aim of enhancing the perceived quality of the exhibition's scenario and boosting the physical and experiential aspect of the cultural offer. In "Shared Holy Places", the curators made use of innovative mediation linking a religious temporality with a museographic advancement used to disseminate a specific religious knowledge and display a diversified immaterial religious heritage to a general lay audience unfamiliar with sensitive issues such as religious identify markers. A first observation stands out that scenographers have achieved relative success in meeting the requirements of museography's standard and public expectation. It is therefore necessary to undertake a thorough and comprehensive analysis on how museography and scenography enhanced the display of intangible religious values and beliefs.

#### 4.1.1.1. Personalized “White Cube” Scenography

It should be remembered that the exhibit “*Shared Holy Places*” has been placed in showrooms already ornamented with enormous wall mosaics. To make up for this disadvantage that may distract visitors’ attention, curators relied on a personalized “white cube” scenography to isolate the viewer and object from this disrupting environment through a scenic setting based on white neutrality, non-existence of decoration, and soft and subtle light. All details have been calculated; colours, backgrounds, mock-ups’ size, showcases’ height, space allocation, and distance between objects in order to produce a spiritual and plastic dialogue between objects and viewers on one hand and a semantic dialogue between objects and the space on the other. The labels which the primary function is giving additional information to object and contextualizing have been made in white and the writing in black with different sizes depending on the explication. It is essential that the labels’ style should be clear, using simple and short sentences that do not exceed on average fifty words.<sup>815</sup> In “*Shared Holy Places*”, the labels were placed on the same level of height with the objects to avoid standing between the gaze of the viewer and the artefact. As a result, they have produced a comprehensive reading, merging aesthetic, religious, and contextual languages. Given that a large proportion of visitors do not have the necessary tools to read Jewish and Christian artifacts, the exhibition texts were simplified to fit with different types of audiences, without affecting objects’ sacred and patrimonial dimension.



Figure 30 The “White cube” scenography and labelling system in *Shared Holy Places*. ©Hamdouni

The size of writing has varied depending upon the information provided, the object’s nature has been written in bold, and the component, iconography, and provenance have been written in

<sup>815</sup> Ezrati, J. J. (1998). *Les panneaux d’exposition, équipements muséographiques*, direction des musées de France, Paris, p. 1.

single characters. This technique allows improving labels' visibility to ensure an optimum legibility that facilitates the reader's comprehension given its immersive character.<sup>816</sup> Along with a specific sound and light processing, this neutral design has been deliberately used to leave space for visitors' imagination and emotion to help visitors interpret objects following their prior knowledge and preference. The work of the scenographer Amani Ben Houssine reflected a well-groomed appearance in which all monotheistic religions were displayed and represented respectfully, ensuring a coherent design that added emotion, respect, and spirituality to the space. In the little palace, the objects that had been juxtaposed, hooked, or placed in showcases formed a fragmentation of space with an empty gap reflecting silence and thus reminding of the silence in sacred places. This juxtaposition of objects of different nature, size, and source material resulted a numbering system linked to explanation labels perched on the showcase. As shown in the picture below, apart from labelling, the scenographer used explanatory panels to enrich the artifacts in terms of meaning, contextualization, and explains the liturgical lexicon and denominate symbols and saints. These panels have been mainly used to transmit a museographic message but have also conveyed objects' significance and symbolism. The essence of objects was not neglected, and numerous panels evoked their historical, stylistic, and artistic context and referred to their iconographic and religious functions.



Figure 31 Numbering labelling system and “interpretative” mediation using explanatory panels. ©Hamdouni

Several shared prophylactic signs such as talisman fish, Jewish “Hamsa”, the Horn of the Gazelle, and the Key to Happiness were displayed in the same showcases to stress belief exchanges between the religious communities. Curators brought to the fore that some jewels

<sup>816</sup> Ekary, M. (1986) *Combining Redundancy: writing texts for exhibitions*. Exhibitions in Sweden, 27 (8), p.1-7.

such as “*Khomsa*” and “Cross” have a religious significance and are still used as talismans against malignant forces before being considered as accessories. Interestingly though, the scenographer has personalized the concept of “*white cube*” to get out of its neutralizing aspect and facilitate the insertion of religious objects into a space foreign to it. In real terms, Amani Ben Houssine tried to boost emersion and establish a relationship between artifacts and visitors with a special focus on their imagination and emotion by employing a specific sound and light system. As a result, 77.6% of the visitors appreciated the atmosphere reminiscent of spirituality of religious peace.

#### 4.1.1.2. Suitable Sonography for Religious Themes

Sound is an integral part of human perception of the world and above all of reality and therefore it is seldom to feel at ease in an environment deprived of any sound stimulation. In museums, sounds reassure, drive away the feeling of loneliness, spatial disorientation, and once connected with other museographic mechanisms such as visual effects and acoustics, allow a good understanding of the environment. That is to say, in an exhibition, the acoustics create of a kind of microcosm that boosts reflection and offers new avenues for displayed objects.<sup>817</sup> In real terms, when used properly, sonography within museums becomes an art of describing and writing with sounds.<sup>818</sup> In “*Shared Holy Places*”, the sound was used as a specific museographic language to ensure a fulfilling experience with religion and to soften the atmosphere. Five soundtracks were broadcast in the exhibition, accompanied by a graphic animation scene of pilgrims’ silhouettes and sound of prayers and songs reflecting the three monotheistic.<sup>819</sup> By referring to religious registers, the sonographers have created a receptive and evocative environment producing a motivational and emotional impact that added sanctity to the space. The soundtracks echoed the theme of religion with acoustics of church bells and Hebrew prayer melodies from the Tunisian Jewish heritage. The soundscape has been incredibly balanced in terms of volume and intensity to avoid distracting visitors, which led to a coherence with the displayed objects. Concomitantly it has created spaces for relaxation and encouraged visitors to move to other showrooms. The sound processing has intentionally fragmented the exhibition into two complimentary spaces: an active space equipped with acoustics and projections (Sousse showroom/lobby) and a passive and soundless space (small palace) in which silence played a polysemic role. The silence was just as much a museographic tool to provoke

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<sup>817</sup> Stocker 1994, p 178.

<sup>818</sup> Lebœuf, D. (1998). *La sonographie au musée*. La lettre de l’OCIM (Dijon), supplément du n° 57, p. 42-45.

<sup>819</sup> Master students of the University of Aix-Marseille in France have realized these sound creations.

submergence, awareness-raising, respect, and piety being key factors in a religious experience. In *"Shared Holy Places"*, the sound processing has not been an arbitrary space filling that weakened the conveyed message, on the contrary it has reinforced the content by producing a sensory, comfortable and relaxing atmosphere that facilitates a clearer understanding of object. Through an analysis of survey data, 52% of the visitors appreciated these innovative sounds that succeeded in transfiguring the space, affecting their emotions, and giving life to objects. Therefore, considering the significance of this factor in enhancing visitors' satisfaction, I will take it into consideration in drawing up my proposal for a museum of religion.

#### 4.1.1.3. Smart Lighting to Create Visual Comfort and Generate Emotions

Within museums, the lighting represents a key element needed to ensure a proper understanding of objects by creating a link between the space and the visitors. This fundamental part of scenography represents an artistic endeavour that has two functions: elucidating itineraries and maximizing objects' appearance and significance. In *"Shared Holy Places"*, improving the aesthetic pleasure and creating a visual comfort in front of religious objects by controlling brightness and reducing dazzle has been a priority goal for the scenographic team. Indeed, through an intelligent light's control system, a soft light similar to natural light was produced to lower contrasts, shade, and adapt the brightness to the colour temperatures of objects. The artificial lighting consisted of light paths without optics mounted in recessed rails in the ceiling projecting an indirect light on surfaces and strengthened by an accent lighting projected onto objects to give the visitor a good latitude to focus. It was made of fluorescent and incandescent light in the form of tight beam bulbs called "spot" and wide beams called "flood". As shown in the photos below, the LED lights have individually illuminated objects with different beam angles without disturbing the entire space. These LEDs succeeded in producing suitable light sources for artifacts by reducing light's nuisance factor.



Figure 32 "White cube" scenography and lighting system in Sousse showroom. ©Hamdouni

For Ahlem Boussada, the scenographers have been successful in reducing shadows facing the objects by placing two upper opposite headlamps to illuminate every artifact without dazzling a reflection or forming any shadows on it, thus giving the viewer a real time position to admire the artifact in detail.<sup>820</sup> As illustrated in the pictures above, there was no direct light targeted on artifacts since this old method is deemed extremely detrimental to objects given the (IR and UV) radiation. Lighting fixtures have been positioned in order to illuminate paintings and sculptures with an optimal angle of incidence of light that rises to 30°. Using this angle, visitors do not risk seeing their shadow on the artifacts, in particular by placing the spotlights outside the reflective surfaces to prevent dazzling but mainly drawing attention to objects and awakening visitors' emotions. Moreover, a natural lighting based on the rays of the sun have been used in halls and the small palace to achieve a good visual balance. Depending on the theme, each showroom reflected its own identity and physiognomy thanks to a light processing that suits the addressed topic.

Visitors' overall assessment for the visual comfort has been very positive, 89% of the interviewees have been awed by the lighting design. This smart lighting based on adjustable spotlights offered an appropriately controlled atmosphere required for a good dissemination of information by making religious objects more lively, attractive, and significant. This stimulating atmosphere has been an essential factor in extending visiting time, banishing boredom, and bettering the religious understanding. It is true that the lighting system managed to create a visual comfort, provide a clear, safe orientation, and good presentation for objects of worship and prophylactic elements; however, I personally did not appreciate this tender and of yellowish colour (warm yellow) that provokes sorrow and reminded me of the Hammamet Museum's lighting plan. A. Boussada claims that using a white background and a cold white light (cold white LED, Ra 90) would be too bright and definitely inappropriate for a religious theme. She considered the colours brightness and temperature perfectly suitable for a religious theme and that using colder colours would lead to creating a frozen "*white cube*". This temperature enabled the viewer to value the texture, shape, and colour of the exhibits, whether objects of worship, works of modern art, paintings, or sculptures.<sup>821</sup> In sum, the visual comfort is a central component in a religious exposure that improves visitors' satisfaction. In that respect, this fact must be taken into account subsequently when conceiving a proposal for a museum of religion.

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<sup>820</sup> Interview with Ahlem Boussada professor of museology and museography in the University of Manouba.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid

#### 4.1.1.4. The Importance of Photographs and Video Sequences for Easing Objects' Interpretation

As part of the “*new museology*”, relying on traditional artistic forms such as paintings, sculptures, and manufactured objects leads often to a partial, closed, and frozen discourse. Pictorial or visual references have become new mediums of artistic expression reflecting a new contemporary creation that can multiply the reading levels.<sup>822</sup> The use of pictorial or visual references (photography and video) do not necessary spoil the exhibition if the references are chosen according to artistic criteria.<sup>823</sup> These references should be creative before being reproduced in a semantic sense and provide of an aesthetic value. For pedagogical reasons aimed at enhancing the methodical explanation of religious objects such as history, authenticity, use, and provenance, several photographs, televised video sequences, and video projections have accompanied the religious objects as communication support. Photographs helped visitors to create a link with the artifacts through a juxtaposition that liberated an aesthetic consciousness, improved objects comprehension by linking objects with their place of origin, and associated rituals. Moreover, the screens and projections have been key visual and cognitive mediums in disclosing information and forming a kinetic sculpture that largely participated in explaining religious similarities in practices such as pilgrimage, prayer, and funerals. These filmed productions, mostly produced by M. Pènicaud, represented an advanced bidimensional version of the photographs that respected a choreography adapted to the theme of religion. it is important to bear in mind that using different medien and advanced scenography cost a great deal of money, which cannot be afforded in many museums.



Figure 33 Photographs and video sequences dealing with religious practice in Sousse Showroom. ©Hamdouni

<sup>822</sup> Gob & Drouguet 2014, p. 160.

<sup>823</sup> Ardenne, P. (1999). *L'art dans son moment politique: écrits de circonstance*. La Lettre Volée, p. 69.

In the exposure, four screens, one video projection, and more than 20 photographs have eluded the “*white cube*” chronophobia by activating the social space and deepening the temporality of a visual experience related to religious practices shared by communities. Concomitantly, the projection created a psychological space by implying visitors’ consciousness flow in terms of religious sharing while prolonging the reflection time all along the documentary film. Indeed, the materialization of religious customs with photography and projection constituted a fundamental element in the interpretation of religious objects. Indeed, 87% of surveyed visitors appreciated the mediation performance of which 33.7% were very satisfied. If photographs and video sequences represent for the Tunisian public a structural element required in a religious exhibition, I should subsequently take heed of this observation when conceiving a proposal for a museum of religion.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (1) that the perceived quality represents a key vector to boost visitors’ perceived value, the results show that the KMO index is of very good quality with a value of 0.930, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the significance of perceived quality and its positive contribution in the validation process of religious exposure. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 86.245% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the unidimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that in a museum of religion, improving perceived quality and ergonomics is a key vector to boost visitor’s perceived value of the exhibited items.

**4.1.2. Perceived Value**

Items	Factorial
	Axe
	2
2.2. The symbolic value of the exhibition is very meaningful	.975
2.4. The visit was a good combination of leisure and learning	.964
2.5. I find the building hosting the exhibition more beautiful than the exhibition itself	.964
2.1. The aesthetic value and religious worth of artifacts impressed me	.958
2.3. The museographic concept impressed me	.935
2.6. The visit is definitely worth the price of admission	.928
2.7. The admission price of the museum was convenient	.911
2.8. The visit was for me an opportunity to develop a new knowledge about religion	.903
2.9. I will recommend the exposition to my relatives	.902

As the values in the table above demonstrate, the visitors’ overall assessment has been positive with a good KMO index (0.908) and a slight variation between some components. As

illustrated, the range of values is between 0.902 (lowest value) to 0.975 (highest value) giving a good indicator to measure visitors' perceived value and its significance in guarantying satisfaction. The component "exposition recommendation" constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to "symbolic value of the exhibition" deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### 4.1.2.1. The Symbolic Value of the Exposition

Religion is often perceived as the cause of many conflicts throughout the world, causing divisions, fractures, wars, and much suffering. To confront this ascertainment, "*Shared Holy Places*" has illustrated the sharing aspect of religions and brought the happy face of tolerance between communities in the Mediterranean region. Curators offered a valuable itinerary displaying religious figures and holy places shared by monotheisms through a symbolic, artistic, anthropological, and ethnographical concept that gathered more than 150 artifacts displaying side-to-side tens of religious formal and quotidian objects from different registers. This approach fostering the culture of nonviolent communication, tolerance, and acceptance of religious otherness has touched a chord with the Tunisian public traumatized by religious obscurantism and misunderstanding. After the revolution, Tunisia experienced a huge change in its social and religious structure after the rise in power of Islamism and the radicalization of a large segment of Tunisian youth. The little knowledge or "religious unculture" as described by the Tunisian Minister of Education, has been a primary cause of this radical orientation that disrupted citizens' convictions and religious freedom. The choice of the exhibition topic (sharing and tolerance) and place (Bardo Museum) hold a considerable symbolic value, being a response to the "*ISIS*" terrorist attack of March 18, 2015 in Bardo which caused in the name of extremism the death of 24 people and injured 45. The exposure did not refer to a singular discourse of truth, but rather to a plural discourse of sharing, tolerance, and fraternity, allowing visitors to experience a genuine encounter with unfamiliar objects and address knowledge weaknesses in terms of the wealth of sharing among religious communities.

In contrast to other museums, religious objects belonging to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were showcased next to each other trouble-free, promoting a ubiquitous message of peace, reconciliation, and tolerance in regard to other religions and faith. Curators displayed the religious diversity and the hidden side of immaterial heritage as an asset leading to coexistence, inter-religious peace, and collective harmony.



Figure 34 Shared prayer scene and prophylactic objects from different religions exposed side by side. ©Hamdouni

The exposure stressed that learning about others paves a way to self-discovery and that broadening knowledge allows one to find spiritual similarities with others and erases submission and exclusivity. Through object, sculpture, photographs, and video, curators displayed an interpenetration of religious tradition, costumes, and beliefs that continues to this day in Tunisia and elsewhere. The veneration of saints, religious intercessors' significance, acts, utterance, and devotional objects were ethnologically reflected to enlighten the widely shared values, myths, and devotion between religions. The scenario of the exhibition highlighted that the Tunisian religious scenes were marked by a proliferation of interfaith convergence forms and interreligious interweaving thanks to the absence of harmful policy issues.



Figure 35. Muslim woman praying side by side with a Jewish woman in Jerba synagogue and Muslim woman reading the surah of Mary with a host on her Koran offered by a nun in Ephesus (Turkey). ©Hamdouni

The synagogue of Djerba represents a prime example for this interreligious hospitality, bringing together Christian and Muslim devotees in various situations such as the fest of “Lag

*Baomer*".<sup>824</sup> What attracts Christians and Muslims to share sacred places, spirituality, and pray to the same god? M. Pènicaud calls it a "*spiritual magnetism*",<sup>825</sup> but I prefer to call it a mutual understanding and a search for the same blessings and expectancy.

In my survey, 93% of the visitors attested to the symbolic value of the exposure in discovering a new meaning of sharing and coexistence and 87% of them mentioned that it has been a great opportunity to develop new religious knowledge. Keeping this positive appreciation of visitors in mind, I will take into consideration this contentment to promote this religious blending between different communities in my proposal and avoid separating religions each in a department in planning the museum. Shedding light on religious similarities and differences between religions through a holistic and peaceful approach will be one of my solid working bases in the museum's proposal. However, it does not mean that I will use a shallow approach that does not criticize and prompt to reflect; to the contrary, I will make use of a dynamic and thought-provoking approach without falling in otherness' denial and hatred.

#### **4.1.2.2. Religion Between Perceptual Learning and Educational Leisure**

In the last decades, the museum has progressed regarding its primary goal and has invested more in its cultural dimension without compromising its educational contribution, and doing this by bringing primarily an understanding and sensitiveness to phenomena before aiming at teaching visitors.<sup>826</sup> This cultural dimension has been brought to the fore in "*Shared Holy Places*" to escape falling in an obsolete and mundane visit that deals with religion distinctively from an educational angle. The exposure has been set up in a comprehensive and coherent framework of an "educational leisure", linking the experience of religion and its sociability to a perceptual learning. Indeed, the more classical the art is, the more the approach becomes educational and the more the discourse becomes historical.<sup>827</sup> What is the way out of this loop? The juxtaposition of objects, religious paintings, contemporary creations, photography, and video projection in a conceptual and performative aspect has added an enrichment to the experience of religion. Curators conceived the itinerary in the form of an exploratory and playful promenade stitched into a mystic atmosphere by accompanying objects with an audio-visual support to extend the contact time with the exhibits.

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<sup>824</sup> Is a Jewish fest of rabbinic institution that tooks place in May (Gregorian calendar).

<sup>825</sup> M. Pènicaud (2016) *l'hospitalité interreligieuse en méditerranée*. In *Lieux Saint partagé*, p 20.

<sup>826</sup> M.-S. Poli (2013) *Éducation et musée*, culture et Musées, Hors-série La Muséologie, p. 168.

<sup>827</sup> Gob, A. & Monpetit, R. (2010). *Introduction*. Culture et Musées 16, p. 14-19.



Figure 36. *Perceptual learning in religious exposure: young audience captured by the media.* ©Hamdouni

As illustrated in the picture above, this mediation attracted a broad segment of the young public given its ludic dimension that promotes memorization by watching under scrutiny objects' history and significance. The apprehension of an artifact is resolved following an astonishment then an enchantment that transforms the artifact into an object of admiration.<sup>828</sup> In "*Shared Holy Places*", video sequences and interactive panels helped visitors to undertake a thorough review based on a spatio-temporal observation and an analysis for objects' religious, symbolic, and aesthetic dimension. However, it should be recalled that the biggest challenge has been to sustain interest to an exposure addressing a complex matter in time devoted to leisure. One question arises then: how did curators cope with this issue and how did they slide from an educational to a cultural and religious dimension?

Engaging the audience with objects through digital media represents a sustainable constructivist pedagogy able to provide significant meaning and improve context.<sup>829</sup> Through a playful language, a visual span and action-oriented learning methods, curators have succeeded in creating a socio-affective liaison between public and objects via an emotional communication that managed to coax a public traumatized by religion. In real terms, the image turned into an explanation's compliment fitted with a memory vocation capable of facilitating the interpretation of objects by de-dramatizing artifacts. The reading comfort used colours, itinerary choices, and the aesthetic and playful dimension of design, which have incorporated religious objects in a logic of seeing and feeling. Curators used religious objects as a gateway to discover oneself, to discover the other, promote immaterial thought in the collective mind, and to confront a singular religious imaginary that deems religion as an additional constraint for the

<sup>828</sup> Gardes-Tamine, J. (2004). *Pour une grammaire de l'écrit*, Paris, p. 23.

<sup>829</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, 2007.

human being. Religion has been displayed as useful knowledge sharing by putting forth the flexibility and cooperative spirit of religious communities. Visitors had to activate a short explicative video to get a comprehensive explanation of objects, which enhanced their involvement to the exposure. This experience allowed visitors to acquire a different vision of religions and to rummage in Mediterranean religious and cultural diversity to understand different semantics, culture, and spiritual beliefs. Curators focused on easing the apprehension of religious diversity and spotlighting the interreligious dimension of this plurality by helping visitors understand, analyse, and reflect notions such as religious identity and common reference. Museography gave visitors a broader view of religious interpenetration by allowing them to refine their perception of religious immaterial value and beliefs. It has changed the classic narrative weave of religion into an emotional experience of knowledge and leisure in which visitors choose to personalize their itinerary in self-guided walking which favoured a good "museum literacy".<sup>830</sup> Nine out of ten (94.7%) of the respondents found that the visit was a good combination of leisure and learning, which is a positive indicator showing that curators succeed in properly combining perceptual learning and educational leisure in the exhibit. Keeping this positive appreciation of visitors in mind, I will take into consideration the significance of finding a satisfactory balance between perceptual learning and educational leisure in my proposal. Nonetheless, I would add to my proposal a few edutainment activities appealing to a younger audience such as multiple-choice questions and recognition and differences games carried out on digital tablets with touch screens to reinforce learning and check newly acquired knowledge.

#### 4.1.2.3. The Impact of Entrance Fee on Visitors' Satisfaction

The visiting practice is deeply influenced by the museum's accessibility, person's financial means, and mainly by the visit cost, since the more a person visits a museum, the less they want to pay for it. In Tunisia, the average price of visiting a museum is five dinars, however, given the singularity of Bardo collections, the price is slightly higher, reaching eight dinars, four dinars for visitors over 60 years old and eleven dinars for foreigners. Comparing this amount to other cultural facilities, this price is well above other leisure activities such as cinemas or theatre, which explains visitors' displeasure with the entrance fee. The organizers of "*Shared Holy Places*" have not added an extra charge to access the exposure. Moreover, the exhibits were purposely placed in front of the main hall, linking different itineraries using soundtracks

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<sup>830</sup> Triquet, E., & Poli, M. S. (2003). *Écrire au musée : pour une approche résolument transdisciplinaire*. LIDILEM 23, p. 47-68.

of church bells, Jewish prayer, and “*Dhiker*”<sup>831</sup> as an appeal to attract visitors to the showrooms. Even if just 34.3% of the surveyed paid for their entrance, the comprehensive review shows a discontent with the entrance fee since 51% of visitors did not find this price convenient. If the State’s overall policy aiming at democratizing access to museums aims at helping strengthen a common culture of open-mindedness, the entrance price should rather consider visitors’ financial situation. For visitors, there is no apparent reason for a pricing surge in Bardo museums, and eight dinars is too much for a single cultural activity. This fact can be explained by the tedious and sluggish financial conditions of citizens suffering from a decreasing spending power after the revolution. However, despite such unfavourable conditions, thousands of Tunisians have visited the exhibition “*Shared Holy Places*” and showed an admiration for this universal message of peace, reconciliation, and tolerance concerning other religions. I will take into consideration the significance of price in encouraging audiences to visit the exposure and I will suggest a decent price in my proposal to encourage more audience groups to come visit the museum of religion.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (2) that bettering visitors’ perceived value guarantees satisfaction, the KMO index is of very good quality with a value of 0.908, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the significance of the perceived value of visitors in guaranteeing satisfaction. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 88.017% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that in a museum of religion, bettering visitors’ perceived value guarantees satisfaction.

**4.1.3. Visitors’ Satisfaction and Concept’s Acceptance**

Items	Factoriel axis
	3
3.6. According to your expectation, how do you rate the coherence of the exhibition?	.953
3.1. According to your expectation, how do you rate the museum's architecture?	.952
3.3. According to your expectation, how do you rate human mediation?	.950
3.4. According to your expectation, how do you rate the concept of the exhibition?	.948
3.7. During the visit, how do you rate the orientation within the visit?	.948
3.8. How do you rate your overall satisfaction?	.944
3.2. According to your expectation, how do you rate the museum’s facilities?	.943
3.5. According to your expectation, how do you rate the core message of the exposure?	.918

<sup>831</sup> Remembering the will of God by reciting phrases as "God willing," and "God knows best".

As the values in the table above demonstrate, the visitors' overall assessment of the concept and the religious message conveyed in this exposure has been positive with a very good KMO index of 0.915 and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.918 (lowest value) to 0.953 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure the acceptance of the concept and the value of the religious message and their significance in guarantying visitors' satisfaction. The component "rate of the religious message" constituted the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to "rate of exhibition coherence", deemed as the strongest link in this assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### **4.1.3.1. The Coherence of the Exhibition**

The exhibition remains the primary path to enter into dialogue with audiences since it informs, distracts, promotes openness and diversity, and leads to questioning phenomena. Nonetheless, this artificial structure will not perform properly if the content is not coherent with the scenario and the message to take up. I believe that "*Shared Holy Places*" was a coherent puzzle that had associated religious practices with embedded objects and offered visitors a liturgical and spiritual experience that responded to their expectations as compared to the classic approach of museums of archaeology and history. This work reflected a long scientific preparation to adapt the concept with visitors' cognitive psychology and echoed a creative imagination to manage juxtaposing different religions and create a religious symbiosis. Finding coherence in enlightening sharing between devotional practices on one hand and in outlining the ripping apart of some religious cohesions on the other is an immaterial matter very difficult to translate into an exhibition language. The question arises then of recognizing how curators succeeded in coherently materializing this theme?

To create a balanced dialogue between various typologies while making religious phenomena visible and perceived by audiences, the curators relied on finding a suitable combination to display objects of devotion, convergence's items, contemporary works of art, photography, and ethnological films without falling in the trap of trivialization. Apart from the religious objects that have a legitimacy dealing directly with the theme, the choice of the contemporary works of art has not been arbitrary since it discloses a tremendous value for religious division. As for the religious divide, the works of art have contributed to create a significant balance between the exposures' two axes (sharing/ division), proposing a revealing reading of the artist's rapport with religious communities' division.



Figure 37. The cross of Lampedusa and the icon of Ian Knowles painted on Bethlehem wall witness the existence and the refusal of the religious division. ©Hamdouni

The works of the artist Benji Boyadgian voicing his refusal to religious division in Bethlehem (separation wall) and the cross of Franco Tucciouse manufactured from the fragments of migrant boat wrecks to draw the attention of the ecclesiastic authorities to ongoing sinking catastrophes reflected a plastic and emotional power that refuses religious separation.<sup>832</sup>

Several displayed items did not mirror religious shared practice; on the contrary, they have been displayed in their difference and distinction, which has created balance, coherence, and avoided falling in a one-way stress approach. Unlike usual vision to deal with religion in Tunisian museums, the strength of “*Shared Holy Places*” lay in its boldness in addressing some key issues such as religious conflict and inter-ethnic differences, which has pleased a large part of the visitors. More than nine out of ten visitors (93.3%) have rated well the coherence of the exposure, which has been an invitation to rethink religion in its commonality and discrepancy. This one indicator among others indicates that in a museum of religion, the coherence of the exhibit remains a determining factor to appeal to and satisfy the public. Thus, this applies to my proposal of a museum of religion in Tunisia.

#### 4.1.3.2. Visitor’ Satisfaction and its Impact on Grasping the Religious Message

Satisfaction is “*a function of the degree of congruency between aspiration and the perceived reality of experiences*”.<sup>833</sup> In museums, adopting a uniquely cognitive approach will not be enough to model satisfaction assessments that require including emotional variables.<sup>834</sup> In this

<sup>832</sup> Marquette, I. (2016). *Exposer les lieux Saints*. In *Lieux Saint partagé*, p 23.

<sup>833</sup> Lee, J., Graefe, A. R., & Burns, R. C. (2004). *Service quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intention among forest visitors*. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 17 (1), p. 74.

<sup>834</sup> Wirtz, J., & Bateson, J. E. (1999). *Consumer satisfaction with services: integrating the environment perspective in services marketing into the traditional disconfirmation paradigm*. *Journal of Business research*, 44(1), p. 55-60.

sense, curators should tell a story constructed around a matter of concern made through a matching of objects aiming at delivering a message based on a scenario that begins by introducing visitors to the subject followed by a development to end up with a conclusion. To improve grasping properly the message, the scenario should be clear, objective, and clearly understandable, which requires a good spatial arrangement and consistency of texts, artifacts, iconography, audio-visual, and design. These factors strongly influence visitors' satisfaction and, consequently, enhances their comprehension and involvement levels.

In "*Shared Holy Places*", the scenography, museography, scene setting, crowding density, and spatial divisions were decisive factors in creating an appropriate narrative framework that helped visitors grasp a subliminal message fostering religious acceptance. Curators have succeeded in improving the cognitive, psychological, and socio-religious "*orientators*"<sup>835</sup> in the exhibitions and thus provided a quality experience adapted to Tunisian visitors. In my survey, 87.4% of the visitors considered the visit to be above average, in which 49.7% reckoned it good and 12% very good, despite some inconvenience related to the orientation and welcome services that did not match their expectation. An indicator of the success of "*Shared Holy Places*" has been that many visitors were engaged in activities such as reading brochures, questioning mediators, and playing videos, and from that statement I presume that engaged visitors are more likely satisfied with the visit. Nonetheless, it should be noted that 43.6% of surveyed visitors expressed clear dissatisfaction with human mediation that was absent and mostly incompetent when asked about some clarification related to displayed objects. Curators mobilized their efforts to ensure that the message that went out to visitors, as it should, was that the scenario fostered religious freedom, tolerance, and peaceful relations between the religions despite differences. The key message of the exhibition was to explain that difference does not necessarily imply religious separation or exclusion, because this diversity represents a collective identity before being a source of conflict. The pacific religious coexistence in Tunisia was brought to the forefront to show that religious communities have nourished a pattern of religious tolerance and co-existence that still can be seen. In sum, it will be highly complex to convey a religious message without ensuring a coherence in the scenario to meet visitors' expectation. This observation stands for my proposal of a museum of religion.

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<sup>835</sup> Orientators is a term used by Goulding to describe condition that orientates visitors within museum. Goulding, C. (2000). *The museum environment and the visitor experience*. European Journal of marketing, p. 273.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (3) that ensuring an overall satisfaction is a key factor to conveying a religious message and guaranteeing acceptance, the KMO index is of very good quality with a value of 0.915, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the significance of visitors’ satisfaction in helping them grasp the conveyed message and accepting the concept. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 89.225% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that in a museum of religion, ensuring overall satisfaction is a key factor to conveying a religious message and guaranteeing acceptance.

**4.1.4. Employed Approach and its Impact on Building Loyalty**

Items	Factorial Axis
	4
4.1. The concept was appealing	.961
4.4. The religious exhibition has been a vital part of the visit	.946
4.3. I recommend this exhibition to deepen religious knowledge	.931
4.2. I will positively advertise to visit the museum	.931
4.6. I want to subscribe this museum	.892
4.5. I feel represented by this exhibition	.836

As the values in the table above demonstrate, the visitors’ overall assessment has been positive with a good KMO index (0.856) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.836 (lowest value) to 0.961 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure visitors’ approach effectiveness and its significance in building loyalty. The component “I feel represented by this exhibition” constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to “The concept was appealing”, deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

**4.1.4.1. A Measured Approach**

Before the revolution, religion had been a frustrating and little discussed subject because of collective imaginary deeming Islam as the “right” religion. My survey’s figure starkly illustrates and confirms this observation since 57.7% of surveyed visitors considered religion as a taboo matter. After the revolution, things have begun to change, and religion has been re-examined as part of a cultural and social policy after the triggering a religious fervour between liberals and conservatives. In this sense, enhancing the quality of the experience has been a

priority throughout the design of “*Shared Holy Places*” in order to create a personal attachment between visitors and objects by incorporating emotional and affective components and make items more meaningful. In real terms, the religious discrepancy has not been an impediment to making connections between objects of different religious origin, for instance the Blue Koran of Kairouan and a ceramic tile of a basilica representing an effigy of Christ has been displayed side by side to address similarities and divergences between Christianity and Islam around the figure of Jesus.<sup>836</sup>



Figure 38 . Creation of connection between objects despite divergence (Christian and Islamic beliefs). ©Hamdouni

In a framework of respect for beliefs, Jesus' ceramic tile has mirrored the Christian belief considering Jesus the son of God and the blue Koran leaf (Surah AZ-Zukhruf 43 verses 54-63) mirrored the Islamic belief considering Jesus the son of Mary and the prophet who precedes Muhammad. This religious merger showed respect for the beliefs and religious sensitivities of others and confirmed that a difference does not mean a complete separation. Implicitly, “*Shared Holy Places*” has rejected community withdrawal, fear, and misunderstanding of alterity caused by ignorance of other beliefs and practices. Through a cautious and well-thought-out approach, curators maligned the religious isolationism, hatred, and confrontation between religions that affected Tunisia from 2011 onward. Indeed, the strength of this exposure lies in displaying that everyone wears interwoven religious symbols without even realizing it and that religion is deeply rooted in human culture, and that only codes have changed. For Isabelle Marquette, bundling objects in the same showcase made it possible to emphasize the concordance of items’ forms, materials, and symbols, thus creating an attachment between religions and enabling to

<sup>836</sup> The blue Koran of Kairouan is one of the masterpieces of the medieval Islamic period (13th century) has been exhibited in the same showcase with a ceramic tile used as decor of a paleo-chretien basilica and representing an effigy of Christ.

send a strong message of moral.<sup>837</sup> The interweaving of beliefs, practices, and objects has been the strongest point of the exposure; it displayed a Tunisian amulet made by Jews and worn by Muslims and vice versa, which paved the way for curators to counter prejudices, stereotypes, and religious condescension.



Figure 39 Interweaving of protection objects and practices between religious communities. ©Hamdouni

Even if some works of art have shown some religious separation, it did not carry any intention of offense or show a degree of affront between religions but more importantly carefully avoided blasphemy to any religious communities. Although some religious symbols have been used as artistic components in some artifacts, this blending has not affected the sacred being of God and his prophets. The approach succeeded in fulfilling visitors' requirement since 87% of the visitors found the concept very appealing and 89.7% would recommend this exhibition to deepen religious knowledge. Achieving visitors' contentment remains an intermediate point between a conative state of recommending the museum to others and an intention of revisiting it. Thus, I should take into consideration this observation in order to improve the likelihood of my proposal's success.

#### 4.1.4.2. The Relevance of Lenders in a Religious Exhibition

A museum that does not lend valuable items and works of art to renew its permanent collections and bring back the public and earn its loyalty is a “dying” museum. Enriching the collections remains one of the hardest tasks for museums, especially when the subject dealt with is difficult to materialize. In religious exhibitions, valuable objects are very difficult to obtain, which request getting partners involved as religious communities and donors to give new impetus to strengthening the collections. Implementing this measure requires successfully persuading

<sup>837</sup> Marquette 2016, p. 23.

them that the musealization of religious objects would add more value to items and increase its lifetime. This aspect was undeniably missing in the Museum of Civilization and Religion of Hammamet, which partly explains its confined collections, the lack of diversity, and the traditional concept overtaken by time. Despite the richness of the Bardo Museum's reserves, ranked second in Africa, the team of *"Shared Holy Places"* have had difficulties in conceiving a scenario congruent with the religious value that is undoubtedly difficult to materialize. It is precisely for this reason that the team counted on the support of some religious communities such as Diocese of Agrigento, Parish of Lampedusa, and artists such as Abdallah Akar, Jacques Peres, Salah Jabeur, and Manoel Pènicaud and borrowed from other museums to undertake this work.

As shown in the photos below, the showroom dedicated to Mary enclosed only three components, all of these objects are lent from public and private collections in France and Tunisia. The contributing of museums such as MuCem, Art and History of Judaism de Paris, Carthage, Nabel, Rakkada, Kairouan, Sfax, and Ben Abdallah brought a clear added value to the exposition script and helped sharpen the focus the richness of religious diversity and practice intersection. The above point is of vital significance to provide support to religious exhibitions; it enhances the quality of experience and improves visitors' intellectual stimulation, which provokes a feeling of continuing involvement through pursuing an interest in religious knowledge. In real terms, the contribution of lenders represents an added variable for a museum of religion to remain of interest for visitors. I consider it important to have a good relationship with religious communities, collectors, artists, and their heirs to facilitate donations and legacies of valuables artifacts and being able to widen the scope of work and to cover the topic from different angles. This observation stands for my proposal of a museum of religion.

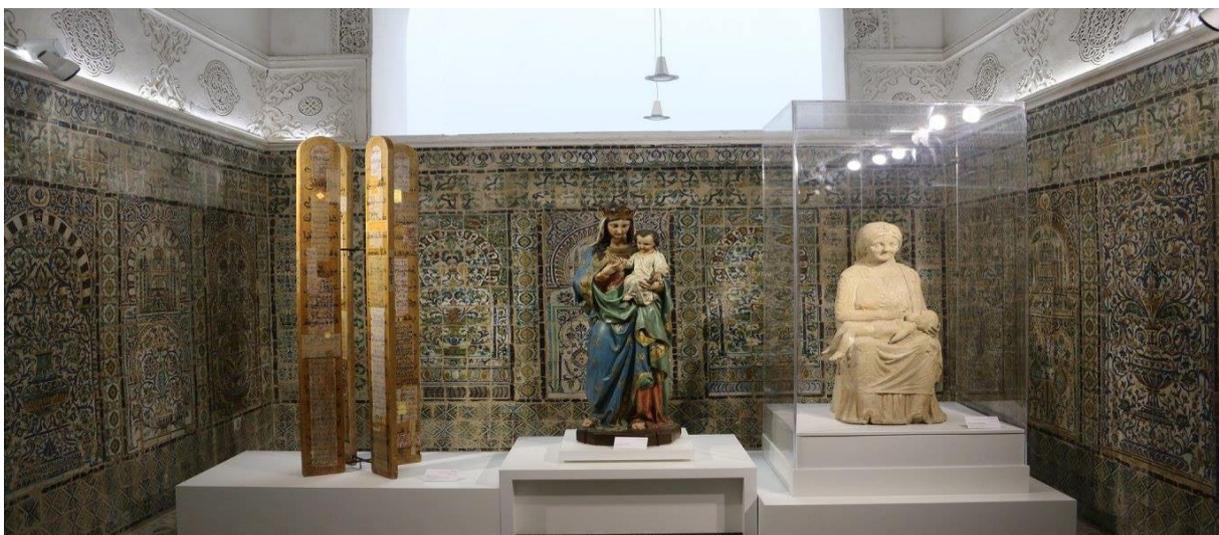


Figure 40 . The importance of loans in a religious exhibition. ©Hamdouni

In the context of checking the hypothesis (4) that adopting a precautionary, coherent, and balanced approach to religion would attract a wider public and increase loyalty, the KMO index is of good quality with a value of 0.856, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the significance of a prudent and balanced approach in attracting the public and increasing its loyalty. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 84.110% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that in a museum of religion, adopting a precautionary, coherent, and balanced approach to religion would attract a wider public and increase loyalty.

**4.1.5. Museum of Religion is an Effective Solution to Develop Visitors’ Religious Knowledge**

Items	Factorial axis
	5
5.3. Do you think that a museum of religion in Tunisia will be a good way to improve knowledge about religion?	.982
5.5. Do you think that Tunisian museums and educational institutions are cooperating to provide information about religion?	.974
5.1. Do you think that Tunisian museums are close to the public?	.974
5.2. Do you think that it is possible for everyone to visit a museum?	.971
5.4. Do you think that students and schoolchildren are regularly visiting museums?	.969
5.6. Do you think that Tunisian museums represent social learning spaces for cultural and religious knowledge?	.927

As the values in the table above demonstrate, visitors’ overall assessment has been positive, With a good KMO index (0.900) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.927 (lowest value) to 0.982 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure the effectiveness of a museum of religion and its significance in building loyalty. The component “Tunisian museums represent social learning spaces for cultural and religious knowledge” constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to “a museum of religion is a good way to improve knowledge about religion”, deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### 4.1.5.1. Cooperative Work Between Museums and Educational Institutions to Provide Information About Religion

Educational and cultural institutions should provide a rich knowledge base for religious heritage to ensure respect for all religious faiths and to raise awareness and understanding about religious diversity. These two institutions should provide a substitute morality that admits the presence of all beliefs in their diversity and allows individuals to choose their humanistic or religious morality. Nonetheless, this will not happen overnight, and it can only happen if schools break with the religious instructional courses and if museums devote a significant priority to wholeheartedly displaying religious phenomena. For the Minister of Education Neji Jalloul, developing public recognition and awareness about religious diversity, common history, and heritage is a lengthy process that starts at the youngest age at schools and grows at museums, and that's the reason why the State should take concrete action to enhance ethnic, religious, and social balance.<sup>838</sup> I agree entirely with this statement because Tunisian schools are marked by an Islamic religious and cultural heritage that hinders openness to other religions and hampers the secularization of society. Indeed, regardless of Islamic education, religious matters are rarely treated at school and boil down to some historical and geographical notions. Before the revolution, any proselytism for a religion other than Islam has been forbidden in public schools. This overarching character of Islam reduced the religious freedom and hampered the construction of cultural education distanced from religion. In the light of Christian pluralism and atheism extension in Tunisia, using Islam as the basis of education can pose a challenge that interferes with the freedom of conscience. I believe that religion should not be taught at school any more as part of a religious instruction, but rather the religious phenomenon in a historical, ethnological, and factual approach that promotes communities' historical legitimacy and guarantees peaceful coexistence. Is it not time for Tunisia to establish a school subject that deals with morality, ethics, and religious phenomena?

For Jalloul, even if other religious communities do not form a large section of the population, the religious pluralism remains a primary element in Tunisia's social balance, and therefore schools should provide courses in history of religion and museums should pay close attention to religious phenomenon.<sup>839</sup> I think that such a reform can promote the moral, spiritual, social, and cultural potential of schoolchildren without affecting their Islamic identity, it would rather develop their sense of citizenship. Moreover, through a reconstruction of religious history and

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<sup>838</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid

inheritance, museums can produce fictitious realities that help schoolchildren come closer to their collective identity by putting them in direct contact with unfamiliar cultures and traditions. Indeed, religious exposures are able to reduce stigma, crush the religious barriers, gain an insight into religious culture, help discover otherness, and go beyond the fear of religion difference. For instance, “*Shared Holy Places*” made the public understand that there is no religious rule in Sharia that prohibits Muslims from accessing a church or a synagogue and that there is no reason to abstain from being in the worship places of others. Even more important, it has displayed objects for religious vows, photographs, and videos of Muslims praying to God from a synagogue in Jerba and from the basilica of the nativity in Bethlehem or Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint George in Buyukada. The lesson learned through this exhibit is that there is no religious sacrilege in praying and making pious wishes from churches as do yearly tens of thousands of Turkish Muslims during the religious fest of Saint George and holy saint Thècle.



Figure 41 . Muslims praying in basilica of the nativity in Bethlehem and woman praying in front of the tomb saint Mahrez<sup>840</sup> the holy saint protecting Muslims and Jews. ©Hamdouni

The exhibition has displayed other places of convergence such as Elijah Cave on Mount Carmel in Haifa in northern Israel that was a church converted to a mosque and then a synagogue by exhibiting common devotional practices of Jews, Christians, and Muslims marked by strong formal heterogeneity in vows materials (messages, drawings, candles, and spools of thread). In my survey, 64.7% consider that Tunisian museums and educational institutions are not cooperating to provide information about religion and this likely represents a challenging reality that must change. I believe that a museum of religion can be a focal body responsible for expanding knowledge exchanges in terms of religion in the area of education and culture.

<sup>840</sup> Mahrez Ibn Khalaf is juris-consult and holy man who offered peace to the Jewish community seeking for its intramural place in the medina of Tunis.

#### 4.1.5.2. A Museum of Religion: An Appropriate Solution for Better Religious Understanding

In the absence of specific sensitivity to religion at school, several Tunisians suffer from a lack of knowledge and understanding of other faiths that constitute an important part of common culture and heritage. In the field of religious heritage, visitors' knowledge is often limited because of some religious convictions that often hinder reflection and an analytical view. Behind this issue lies several deeper societal challenges since after the revolution religion has become a highly topical issue that placed religious freedom, observance, and heritage in jeopardy after the wave of Islamism. Tunisians have not deliberately chosen to be misinformed about other confessions; it is the state policy that is responsible for hindering the dissemination of religious knowledge that led to ignorance and unawareness.



Figure 42. Three visitors of different profile engaged in the exposure. ©Hamdouni

The pictures above show a deep interest of visitors of different ages in learning more about immaterial religious heritage, and I believe that religious belonging, conviction, to be a believer or not have nothing to do with learning about religion; visitors come to discover, understand, and reflect. The concept of “*Shared Holy Places*” revolved around an unfamiliar theme for a public relatively withdrawn in terms of religion, especially since Jewish and Christian practices don’t occur in public. Moreover, through this, curators succeeded in creating a stimulating experience that displayed religious expressions and practices and in reflecting the relationship between believers and divine and sacred places. It is true that Tunisians are unaware of different faith practices and beliefs but that doesn't mean that they are not interested in getting acquainted with other faiths, and the strongest evidence remains that 75.7% of the visitors considered that a museum of religion would be a good way to improve knowledge about religion.

In museums of history and archaeology, the transition from religious to cultural damages artefacts' significance and deprives it of its initial context, essence, and sacredness as part of a shift from spiritual to historical; however, this switch can be prevented in a museum of religion that gives much higher priority to objects' symbolism and spirituality. A museum of religion can be a prospect to compensate for religious practices' invisibility in society and can play a key role in reducing religious "unculture". I think that it would be a highly efficient means to extend visitors' knowledge in terms of religion and get to the heart of the matter by involving several social sciences such as science of religion, archaeology, ethnology, sociology, history, history of arts, and exhibition's sciences. It can offer to the public the necessary codes to decrypt objects' religious symbolism and consequently stop apprehending items in an aesthetic frame without referring to their religious context. Moreover, it would be able to create a dialogue between art and faith by recontextualizing objects as part of an intellectual stimulation endowed with knowledge.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (5) that a museum of religion in Tunisia will be an effective solution to develop visitors' religious knowledge, the KMO index is of very good quality with a value of 0.900, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the importance of a museum of religion as a future solution to inform Tunisians about religion. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 93.394% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that a museum of religion In Tunisia will be an effective solution to develop visitors' religious knowledge.

**4.1.6. Immaterial Religious Heritage and Objects' Sacredness in Museums**

	Factorial axis
	6
6.5. How do you rate the standpoint used in "Shared Holy Places" in terms of dealing with religious matters?	.944
6.2. How do you rate the priority given to display immaterial religious heritage in Tunisian museums?	.920
6.3. How do you rate your interaction with the religious objects in the exhibition?	.920
6.4. How do you rate the work done to highlight objects' symbolism and sacredness in the exhibition?	.902
6.6. How do you rate the importance of the immaterial religious heritage in the country's patrimony?	.897
6.1. How do you rate the consistency of religious collections in Tunisian museums?	.895
6.7. How do you rate the displaying of others' beliefs in Tunisian museums?	.845

As the values in the table above demonstrate, visitors' overall assessment has been positive, with a good KMO index (0.879) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.845 (lowest value) to 0.944 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure the necessity of giving importance to immaterial religious heritage in museums and of adding value to object symbolism and sacredness. The component "rating of displaying others' religions and faith in Tunisian museums" constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to "rating of the pluralist dimension in *"Shared Holy Places"* in terms of dealing with religious matters", deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### **4.1.6.1. Immaterial Religious Heritage is an Enormous Untapped Potential in Museums**

Tunisian religious heritage remarkably varied in terms of style (engravings, sculptures, paintings, and drawings), materials (ivory, wood, metal, cloth, paper, and goldsmith), and techniques (embroidery, stained glass). Nonetheless, focusing on the material dimension of this patrimony at the expense of the spiritual dimension has caused a disproportionate imbalance in Tunisian museums. In my survey, 48.4% of the visitors rated the priority given to display immaterial religious heritage in Tunisian museums below average: 18.7% rated it "mediocre" and 29.7% rated it "very mediocre". As a result, various practices associated to objects are unknown to the public and seems to be threatened by oblivion caused by a neglect to the immaterial aspect of this patrimony and a religious refusal, especially since some Christian and Jewish worship places have been disused, transformed into dwellings or public areas, if not demolished. Even Islamic heritage did not escape this threat since some flagship monuments such as the mausoleum of Saïda Manoubia<sup>841</sup> has been set on fire by religious extremists who oppose Sufi practices. In the face of authority's passivity, the religious inheritance seems to be condemned by obscurantists' violence, marginalization, and mainly artifact smuggling, which can be halted by implementing a policy that brings to the fore religious artifacts in museums. I believe that it is high time that the issue of religious pluralism should no longer disturb the public opinion or intimidate the dominant religious group that considers its religion as an ideal. Despite the strife and division between "currents of memory",<sup>842</sup> it is time to start a real museumization of the religious memory in its immaterial dimension and provide the public with a visual storytelling of a plural collective memory that takes into consideration communities'

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<sup>841</sup> A historic building dating back to 9 centuries and amputating a common memory and tolerance of holy women.

<sup>842</sup> Halbwachs, M. (2010). *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Vol. 5). Walter de Gruyter, p. 146-177.

political, social, historical, and territorial contexts. Narrowing the concept of intangible religious heritage to religious beliefs, gestures, and practices is extremely reductive since it does not refer to the essential core of the religious experience. The immaterial dimension encompasses also the personal resonances and particular characteristics of worship-related behavior. So how best to exhibit this immateriality?

An effective approach to the intangible aspects of religion should put great emphasis on:

- The use and meaning of sacred spaces and community spaces as places of worship such as cemeteries
- The symbolic, sacred, and spiritual dimension of religious, liturgical, and devotional objects
- The ways of living and practices related to spiritual life such as funerary customs and liturgical practices
- The “know-how” of religious community such as craft and food production according to religious requirement

In “*Shared Holy Places*”, 60.6% of the visitors rated positively the standpoint used in “*Shared Holy Places*” in terms of dealing with religious matters. The exposure has devoted an important part of the work to create keys of reading and interpretation accessible to public unfamiliar with Jewish and Christian liturgy and devotional practices. This multicultural and multi-religious context produced an exalting and pluralist experience that managed to introduce visitors to several emblematic beliefs, practices, and worship places in a religious, liturgical, and artistic dimension. Even if religious visions do not fully overlap, curators have succeeded in informing visitors that several religious practices, signs, and symbols are inter-changeable between monotheistic religions and that of Jewish and Christian material and immaterial legacies belonging to the Tunisian collective heritage. Museums as Sousse, Carthage, and Bardo exhibit Pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic artifacts of strong symbolic value but fail to interpret spirituality and creates links between religions. They tackle religious objects only from the angle of history of art, which I consider severely reductive, not to say erroneous.

In my survey, 60.3% of the visitors assessed negatively the displaying of others’ beliefs in Tunisian museums and rated it “very mediocre”. The museum should broaden the focus on objects’ spiritual dimension and emerge from the aesthetic isolation caused by the institutional

secular dimension of museums that only value the cultural function of objects and overlooks its intangible character related to belief. Based on visitors' experience and assessment to the exposure "*Shared Holy Places*", I consider that "*religiosa*"<sup>843</sup> are equally important in the "*museumization*" of religious memory and that the plural vocation is essential to contribute to a dialogue between religions, civic education, and living together. When focusing on the immaterial aspect of objects, the museum of religion could have a utility of public order. This observation should be taken into account when planning my proposal.

#### 4.1.6.2. The Importance of Putting Forth Objects' Sacredness and Spiritual Value

The "religious phenomenon"<sup>844</sup> has been at the origin of the formulation of cultural heritage when religious institutions have acted as guarantor of material and immaterial memory by according a privileged status to religious artifacts and object-witnesses embedded with sacred values and spiritual symbolism. Nonetheless, the spiritual dimension of religious inheritance is rarely mentioned in heritage literature and is often classified in the field of intangible legacy that includes rituals, traditions, and knowledge.<sup>845</sup> Even if these "*religiosa*" are closely related to an intangible dimension, they remain tangible items fitted with a spiritual dimension or a sacred value. Thus, the relevant question is therefore whether it is possible to merge two phenomena with a different system of intelligibility, or should the "sacred" remain for worship, and heritage for culture. If the museum is deeply embedded in secularism, does it oppose the spiritual values of religious objects? Is it easy to apprehend this intangible and metaphysical dimension far from the ritual use? By displaying sacred and religious art, museums should not only adopt an informative approach that does not stimulate reflection but rather a multifaceted approach to strengthen visitors' capacity for understanding and critical thinking. Tunisian museums attach more importance to objects' historical value for its easier reading and approval to the detriment of spiritual sacred values.

Unlike this approach called a "*museology of the object*",<sup>846</sup> the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" has employed a "museology of the idea" in which the object remains not significant in itself but derives its meaning, legitimacy, effectiveness, and religious value from the exhibition scenario. In contrast with the communicational approach commonly used in Tunisian museums, this situational approach has allowed to restore a ritual and spiritual context through a specific

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<sup>843</sup> Religious and « sacred » objects used in cultural field. Van Gijseghem, H. (2014). *Hubert, La psychologie du collectionneur*, essai de typologie, SaintLambert, Groupéditions, p. 69-71.

<sup>844</sup>Babelon, J. P., & Chastel, A (1995) *La notion de Patrimoine*, Paris, Liana Levi, p. 141.

<sup>845</sup> Poulot 1998.

<sup>846</sup> Davallon 1992, p. 100-101.

scenography that has varied according to the theme using different museographic tools in each showroom. This scenography often used in religious exhibition to refer to particular practices or places allows restoring a context and adapting a spiritual message that put forth objects and communities' values through reconstructions.<sup>847</sup> This approach allowed curators to break with the chronological presentation and objects' singular valorization and created a coherent whole in which objects interact with each other to boost the main message of sharing. As a result, the interaction between exhibits has created a visual and semantic dialogue with objects linked to prophets and holy persons.

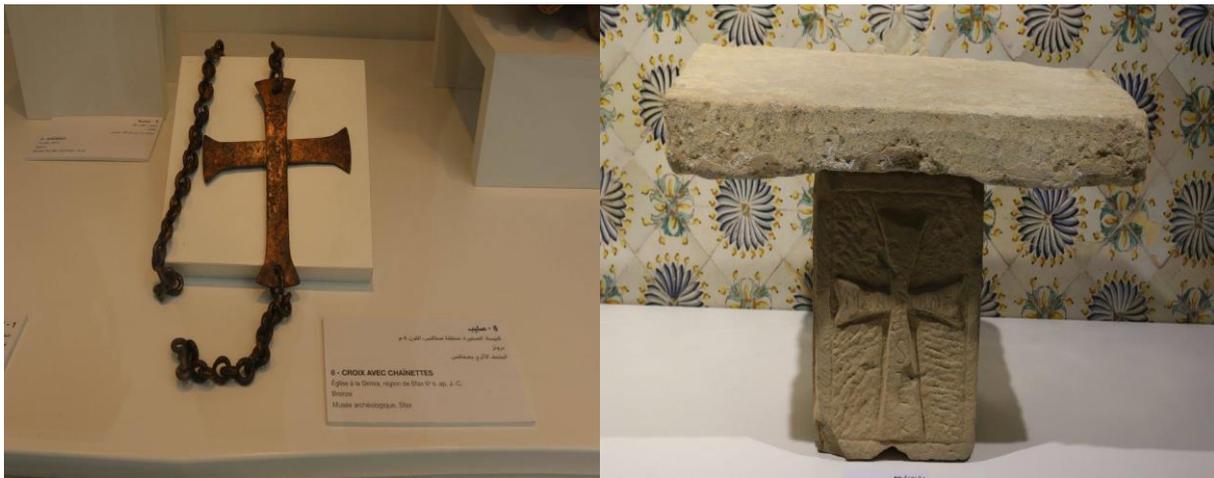


Figure 43 . Two Christian objects displayed separately in two showrooms: the symbol is the same but the message is different.  
©Hamdouni

By providing codes and reading keys to visitors, religious objects have delivered an emotion, whether historical, cultural, spiritual, or “sacred”, and multiple forms of knowledge that visitors differently interpret and classify according to their conviction. The scenario valued interactivity and gave priority to artifacts' intelligibility, which has provided an innovative way to clarify objects' spiritual and sacred dimensions. Promoting the intelligibility of objects' religious value for all types of public has been prioritized in the design and the realization of the exhibition to demonstrate a concrete form of beliefs and traditions in its polysemy and to question societal subjects related to religious conviction without giving reasons for the refusal. In “*Shared Holy Places*” nothing has been left to chance since the choice of the showcases, cartels, and lighting have been carefully selected to form a cohesive unit that put forth objects' spiritual dimension without excluding their artistic dimensions. The wall hanging of religious paintings (height, distance, overlap) has significance since some paintings have not been hooked but rather placed in showcases to stress their sacred value. This design allowed visitors to fully appreciate and

<sup>847</sup> Tuboeuf, C. (2016). *Exposer le patrimoine religieux catholique dans les musées, entre sacré et culturel: regards croisés France-Québec*, Québec. Art et histoire de l'art, p 103.

capture several paintings at once. Eight out ten of the respondents (81%) expressed satisfaction with the set-up of and appreciation with the emphasis put on objects’ signification and symbolism. This design added a pious quietude to the atmosphere and created a relaxation that helped extend the visit duration and stimulate reflection. For this reason, I should consider this observation when planning my proposal. In the context of checking the hypothesis (6), that religious heritage is an enormous untapped potential in Tunisian museums and that objects’ sacredness is not being flagged in exhibitions, the KMO index is of good quality with a value of 0.872, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the importance of putting forth objects’ sacredness and spiritual value in a museum of religion. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 81.685% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that religious heritage is an enormous untapped potential in Tunisian museums and that objects’ sacredness is not being flagged in exhibitions, which I should avoid when planning my proposal.

**4.1.7. The Feasibility and Chance of Success of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia**

Items	Factorial axis
	7
7.2. Do you think that a museum of religion will be a successful initiative?	.956
7.1. Do you think that a museum of religions will be a suitable scheme for an interreligious dialogue in Tunisia?	.952
7.3. Do you think there is a similar project in another country?	.932
7.6. Do you think it is better to display only the common religions in Tunisia?	.930
7.4. Do you think Tunisian religious tangible and intangible heritages require such a project?	.905
7.7. Do you think it is better to display all world’s religions as does the museum of religion in Canada?	.884
7.5. Do you think that religion is a taboo topic in Tunisia?	.865

As the values in the table above demonstrate, visitors’ overall assessment has been positive, with a good KMO index (0.850) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.865 (lowest value) to 0.956 (highest value) giving a good indicator to measure the feasibility and the chance of success of a museum of religion in Tunisia. The component “religion is a taboo topic in Tunisia” constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to “a museum of religion will be a successful initiative”, deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### 4.1.7.1. Success Factors and Feasibility of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia

If religious institutions use their spiritual resources to promote religious conviviality, then a spirit of peace and coexistence would reign in the world.<sup>848</sup> Several religious authorities became aware of the importance of human understanding and peace and call therefore for interreligious dialogue and a recognition of other religions' spiritual, moral, and socio-cultural values.<sup>849</sup> The question then arises, is it not time to provide the public with these interreligious expressions in museums? In my survey, 89.4% of the visitors considered that a museum of religion will be a successful initiative and 90% deemed it as a suitable scheme for interreligious dialogue in Tunisia. These figures, which are very encouraging, demonstrates an unwavering open-mindedness to be acquainted with a wider religious knowledge in order to overcome prejudices and xenophobia. I truly believe that the positive appreciation of "*Shared Holy Places*" has played a significant role in spontaneously increasing public acceptance and reducing identity resistance. As a space for living repositories, the primary goal of a museum of religion is to involve, move, and stir visitors' feelings in the religious realms through a process of transmission that values objects' significance.

My research uses this exposure as a prototype or a test sample to measure the impact of displaying religious plurality in its deep-rooted historical and societal reality in museums. Without this empirical study, that has analysed the exhibition strength and weakness and tried to understand the visitors' expectations, my research would have been more theoretical. This exposure addressed the religious phenomenon differently, it has valued "the spirit of the place"<sup>850</sup> and objects' authenticity and significance without falling into facsimile reconstitution. What was different about this exposure, and could it be used to increase the chance of success of my proposal? The strong feature of this exhibition has been that the scenographic devices have not been too invasive and disturbed the reading of artifacts. On the contrary, they helped visitors' understanding of artefacts in their immaterial dimensions. Remarkable is the fact that visitors have not made use of oral mediation (human mediation) thanks to developed labels, mainly introductory panels, and video sequence, which have clarified the necessary information to visitors and linked the religious artifacts to its moral discourse. The "interpretative"<sup>851</sup> mediation used in "*Shared Holy Places*" has broken with the obsolete and rigid patrimonial

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<sup>848</sup>Geffré, C., & Jarczyk, G. (1999). *Profession théologien: quelle pensée chrétienne pour le XXIe siècle?*; entretiens avec Gwendoline Jarczyk, Paris, Albin Michel, p. 200-312.

<sup>849</sup> Aucante, V., & Benedictus, P. P. (2008). *Benoît XVI et l'islam*. Parole et silence.p 18.

<sup>850</sup> Transcribe the memory of religious spaces by a valuation of the immaterial. Vieil, A. (2011). *Quand souffle l'esprit des lieux*, Actes du colloque : Médiation culturelle dans un lieu patrimonial Saint-Vougay, p. 45-51.

<sup>851</sup> Tilden, F. (2009). *Interpreting our heritage*. Univ of North Carolina Press, p. 200-242.

vision of religious artifacts used in Tunisian museums. Indeed, multimedia devices have played a remarkable role in promoting the recontextualization and the semantic elucidation of religious objects since thanks to testimonies, documentaries, and interviews, curators offered a living version of religious faiths and practices. The visit has been a "living" experience in which the artifacts have played a key role in the reconstruction of the religious phenomenon. The religious object has not been displayed isolated from the whole discourse but rather as a factor to foster emotion and religious sensitivity. The curators have purposefully strengthened the scenario's key drivers (staging, colours, and light) to create a context of delectation that helps visitors to experience both a sensitive and aesthetic experience.

Despite the difficulty of displaying religious beliefs, expressions, traditions, and scenes due to the lack of authentic objects, the content has not been distant to the reality and has relied on images' strengths to acute objects' shortage because religious images often spark a positive emotional reaction and deeply affect the viewers.<sup>852</sup> Through religious paintings, curators gave great importance to expressing the "mystery" and the invisible as a full-fledged component of religious art. In real terms, they produced an immersive memory and a spiritual experience that took place in the mental substance and the imaginary of visitors. Another significant highlight of this exposure is that visitors have been free to choose the form of their experience whether confessional, spiritual, devotional, cultural, human historical, or aesthetic, and more importantly, they have not felt vexation, annoyance, or that beliefs have been defamed. In real terms, the mediation did not hinder the freedom of appreciation of one object over another, or force an interpretation on another, it only guided the visitor in their reading of artifacts. All these factors have reinforced the public's acceptability of the exposure, which should be taken into consideration when designing my proposal of a museum of religion.

#### 4.1.7.2. A Preference for Monotheistic Religion

According to the way in which religions are communicated or transmitted, religions are not identical and can be grouped into two categories: the religion of the book and the ethnic religion (customs).<sup>853</sup> The Monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are based on belief, the faith in a god and the sacred scriptures opposed to other beliefs or convictions characterized by ancestor worship. Unlike the monotheistic religions that aspire to universality, ethnic

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<sup>852</sup> Giguère, V. (2012). *Quand l'historien de l'art regarde le patrimoine religieux: questions d'anthropologie et d'esthétique*. Études d'histoire religieuse, 78(1), p 12.

<sup>853</sup> Ortigues, E. (1999.) *Religions du Livre et religions de la Coutume*. Paris: Sycomore, p. 10-223.

religions have no creed and attach religious piety for ancestors instead of God. For instance, Muslims coexist with other beliefs with different scriptures of monotheism such as Hinduism and Buddhism. However, they reject monolatry and have a preference for the religions of the book in which God is both the source of revelation and the object of worship.<sup>854</sup> This mental boundary and religious fence associated with the character of monotheism can be a factor of intolerance toward other religions. This observation may explain why 74.7% of the visitors consider that is better to display only the religion of the book in the museum of religion. This preference for monotheistic religions can be explained by the Islamic convictions that reject spiritual communion with religions other than those of the book, or by a fear that other faiths leach into the society and doom Tunisian youth that can yield to other confessions. In Tunisia, the religious communities live in a harmonious conviviality marked by a freedom of worship and conscience. However, I consider it as a form of indifferent coexistence or a conditioning tolerance that admits religious otherness and existence and not a religious understanding, acceptance, and reconciliation. I think that the interreligious dialogue should not exclude any confessions to maintain a critical spirit and ensure a spiritual circulation's continuity. The primary issue is, of course, accessibility and tolerance. Is it not time for monotheistic religions to resolve the contradiction of being universal and concomitantly reject faith plurality?

Even as it raises spiritual, political, practical, and theological concerns; dialogue between religions remains a key component of social coexistence, which implies to dismiss any idea of exclusion.<sup>855</sup> Being tolerant means to recognize beliefs' plurality and culture diversity and admits that a religion cannot be a holder of a unique "truth". That was the primary purpose of the exhibition "*Shared Holy Places*" that has tried to show visitors that it is possible to move from a division of "us" and "them" to a common and comprehensive "we" as part of a single human community. "*Shared Holy Places*" helped visitors to imagine what a museum of religion in the future might be like, a catalyst in boosting a "spirituality of inclusion" that breaks differences barriers. I think that that creating a space for an interreligious dialogue in Tunisia can reduce the alienation between communities and develop cultural exchange among people to accept religious differences without violence. It is important to underline that many visitors suggested in the comment box of the survey to give appropriate importance to Amazigh's beliefs as original inhabitants in the design of the museum. Visitors noted that Amazigh's

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<sup>854</sup> Ndiaye, A. R. (2012). *Religion, foi, et tolerance*. Journal of Philosophical Research, 37, p. 203-207.

<sup>855</sup> Ariarajah, S. (1999). *Not without my neighbour: issues in interfaith relations*. World Council of Churches, p. 23-37.

religious practices are unveiled to the public because they do not form an integral part of museum work and that being part of the museum’s design will be a first in Tunisia and a recognition of this community. Amazigh’s religious heritage is a significant part of Tunisian common identity that should be preserved from oblivion and more importantly should be displayed to the public to be acquainted with their beliefs and practices. I will consider this observation when conceiving my proposal, and I will shed light on Amazigh’s spiritual, liturgical, and religious beliefs, practices, and values in the exposition’s scenario.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (7) that if it is properly conceived, a museum of religion in Tunisia has a great chance of success, the KMO index is of good quality with a value of 0.850, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the feasibility of a museum in Tunisia. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 84.350% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that that if it is properly conceived, a museum of religion in Tunisia has a great chance of success.

**4.1.8. Religious Coexistence and Degree of Tolerance in Regard to Religious Minorities**

	Axe factoriel
	8
8.3. Do you think that religious minorities are an essential value in Tunisian culture?	.963
8.4. Do you have friends or relatives belonging to another religious faith?	.958
8.7. Do you think that members of religious minorities have the right to access the policy in Tunisia?	.948
8.5. Do you tolerate religious conversion?	.941
8.1. Do you think you are a tolerant person with regard to religious belonging?	.937
8.2. Do you think Tunisians are generally tolerant with respect to religious minorities?	.920
8.6. Do you think that religious minorities pose a threat to the Muslim identity in Tunisia?	.853

As the values in the table above demonstrate, visitors’ overall assessment has been positive, with a good KMO index (0.841) and a slight variation between some components. As illustrated, the range of values is between 0.853 (lowest value) to 0.963 (highest value), giving a good indicator to measure visitors’ degree of tolerance in regard to religious minorities. The component “religious minorities pose a threat to the Muslim identity in Tunisia” constitutes the weakest link in the evaluated items, contrary to “religious minorities are an essential value in

Tunisian culture”, deemed as the strongest link in the assessment process, which requires a more comprehensive analysis.

#### 4.1.8.1. The Religious Scene and the "Structure-Tolerance" in Tunisia

Following the revolution in 2011, Tunisia’s religious scene underwent a surge in religiosity that inspired violence and threatened its political transition.<sup>856</sup> After more than 50 years of state-imposed secularism, Tunisia is struggling to reshape and organize its religious scene; however, the question remains to whether there is a religious identity for a state? Religious identity is a sense of group belonging, regardless of the participation in religious activities, it significantly differs from religiosity and religiousness.<sup>857</sup> This type of identity formation defines a single group and not several, so it is incredibly difficult to ascribe a religious identity to a state given the heterogeneous nature of religious and ethnic groups in a single country. It should be cautioned that the identity is not a fixed concept; it is rather changing which make it reductive to ascribe it for a complex entity. Furthermore, assigning a religious identity to a state will be discriminative for religious minorities and non-believers, being against the notion of universal human dignity and the recognition of otherness. In Tunisia, Islam is a state religion, but it is not the source of law. This Islamic character chosen after the independence has been a crucial point that pushed the Jewish to leave the country in droves due to a complex integration with a dominant culture that has transformed the Jewish community into a minority.<sup>858</sup> However, if the religious scene is organized in Tunisia in a legal, political, and ritual framework that guarantees full freedom to minorities to practice their religion, does this organization imply a coexistence?

Tunisia is undoubtedly the most "atypical" country in all the countries of the Maghreb,<sup>859</sup> it recognizes religious difference in a non-hierarchical framework, organizes it, and tries to deepen communities’ mutual understanding and tolerance. In return, religious minorities have not been able to fully integrate the society due to their social withdrawal. The concept of minority has a semantic content that goes beyond the numerical significance and implies subordination relation between a dominating majority and a dominated minority. These

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<sup>856</sup> Haim, M. (2014, Mai) *The Struggle for Religious Identity in Tunisia and the Maghreb*, Center for strategic and international studies CSIS, retrieved on 09.04.2018 from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/struggle-religious-identity-tunisia-and-maghreb>.

<sup>857</sup> Arweck, E., & Nesbitt, E. (2010). *Young people's identity formation in mixed-faith families: continuity or discontinuity of religious traditions?* *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 25(1), p. 70-71.

<sup>858</sup> Valensi & Udovitch, 1991 p. 138-139

<sup>859</sup> Camau, 1987, p 11-12.

rappports often generate conflict situations caused by a differentiation's management and subordination's instrumentalizing.<sup>860</sup>

In Djerba, Jews avoided extreme involvement with the surrounding society and established few closing procedures arranged in different form: physical (separate living and burring structures), material (eruv's wire surrounding the Hara), religious (ritual, calendar), social and culinary. These transmission mechanisms of religious and intellectual tradition visible in the forms of beliefs, rules, practices, and even sanctions aimed at guaranteeing minority religious cohesion are of great interest to the public and worth being exhibited in a museum of religion. In my survey, 52.6 % of visitors deemed the religious minorities as a solid value in Tunisian culture and an essential component in social fabric that should operate freely in cultural, artistic, economic, and political fields. Thus, I believe it is time that intercommunity relations should be rethought and, above all, religious communities should find an understandable and acceptable language to all Tunisians in order to start a cross-religious cooperation in various areas such as culture, art, and museum. In "*Shared Holy Places*", religious art has been a genuine common language to inform the public about the diversity and the sharing of their common religious heritage. Religion has been presented as a factor of a peaceful "*living together*" thanks to cross-cultural and spatial rappports and an inter-religious understanding relationship far from any communitarian affirmation. The premise behind showing this inter-religious sharing is to show that tolerance can transcend religious boundaries, embrace diversity, and fight for social inclusion. It has revealed another facet of Tunisia, marked by its tremendous capacity for assimilation and social and religious adjustment.

Recognizing the difference and tolerating it are two different aspects, since tolerance implies a refusal of discrimination. In Tunisia, national and civic belonging is stronger than religious coexistence; it is than a question of a "*structure-tolerance*",<sup>861</sup> or rather a form of recognition without reconciliation given the majority's attachment to its irreducible identity. This "*structure-tolerance*" respects human dignity but does not involve a reconciliation, deemed as an erasure of identity. In my survey, 83.3 % of the visitors have attested to their tolerance concerning different religious affiliations, and 16.7 % attested their intolerance. Nonetheless, I regard it as a recognition of religious otherness to bridges differences more than a tolerance; it

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<sup>860</sup> Isabelle, R. (2010). *Minorité religieuse. Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, p. 718-720

<sup>861</sup> Zarka & Fleury 2004, p 5.

is more a limited acceptance of religious particularisms and manifestations. Coexistence is far more developed since it implies a reciprocity between different religious groups in order to foster plurality, equality, dignity of beliefs, and thus human dignity in all its universality.<sup>862</sup> For this very reason, I think that a museum of religion in Tunisia can foster liberative understandings and can positively influence and convince the public that religious reconciliation is not a suppression of their culture or a social climbing of a religious community but rather a symbiosis of collective memory and a cultural miscegenation that occurs in all democratic societies. From a political point of view, the issue of religious diversity appeared in 2011 in a different light when the democrats led a strategic campaign to defend minorities' rights in participating in political life.

For Jacob Lelouch, a Tunisian Jew who was a candidate in parliamentary elections of 2011, integrating political life is a way of rejecting the stereotype that a non-Muslims should stay away from politics.<sup>863</sup> Indeed, Albert Bessis and André Barouch are the only Tunisian Jews who have been appointed ministers in the sixties and it would have to wait until 2018 before another Jew, Rene Trabelsi, fulfilled the function of tourism minister. In my survey, 57.3% of the visitors considered that religious minorities have the right to participate in political life against 42.7% who preferred that they should refrain from participating in policies. Religious minorities have never shown willingness to undertake a social change in Tunisia, which has fostered trust and pacifism with the Muslim majority. Indeed, 87% of the visitors considered that they do not pose a threat for the Islamic identity and are not socially disruptive, as it is evidenced in many cities such as Tunis, Djerba, and la Goulette. Nonetheless, I consider that still, there is some discriminative form concerning religious minorities, such as Article 74 paragraph 1 of the Constitution of 2014 which attests that only a Muslim can stand for the post of President of the State. Tunisia experienced in the past decade a religious renewal in which converting became a new trend when some young people in search of spirituality converted to Christianity. This phenomenon has strengthened after the arrival of the African Development Bank's Christian employees in 2005, which has revived Christianity and has created multiple situations of religious plurality.<sup>864</sup> This mechanism of attracting individuals within a religious group, as described by Colman,<sup>865</sup> has instilled fear into Tunisians who regards this action as

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<sup>862</sup> Zarka & Fleury, 2004, p. 25-26.

<sup>863</sup> Pouessel, S. (2012). *Les marges renaissantes: Amazigh, Juif, Noir*. Ce que la révolution a changé dans ce «petit pays homogène par excellence» qu'est la Tunisie. *L'Année du Maghreb*, (VIII), p.143-150.

<sup>864</sup> Boubakri & Mazzella 2005, p. 149-165.

<sup>865</sup> Coleman, S. (2003). *Continuous conversion? The rhetoric, practice, and rhetorical practice of charismatic Protestant conversion*. *The anthropology of religious conversion*, p. 15-20.

an “irtidād”.<sup>866</sup> As expected, 68% of the surveyed visitors showed an intolerance toward religious conversion and deemed it as a betrayal and a sin in Islam. Nonetheless, religious conversion goes the other way excessively, and many Christians converted to Islam in Tunisia.

Whether it is a social phenomenon, a personal deliberation, or a religious revitalization, religious conversion remains a form of freedoms of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution. It mirrors a modification in social rapports without altering the balance of power between religious groups, which should be reflected, analysed, and criticized if it is instrumentalized by religious institutions, and the most likely place for this process remains a museum of religion. I truly believe that these socio-religious changes and topical issues occurring in Tunisia might be better reflected in temporary exposure to give a fresh impetus to permanent exhibits. For instance, the Jewish diasporic movement and identity claims should be addressed in a museum of religion for the significance of its religious and sociological dimensions visible in many forms of structuration. A museum of religion is certainly a space of diffusion of knowledge but can also be an effective tool to promote a culture of tolerance and peace and to enhance a real religious coexistence among various communities that goes beyond a mere recognition and a disguised acceptance. This process that needs a strong commitment to interreligious dialogue and reconciliation between religious groups to stand side by side to ensure discussions continuity should start at the beginning in a museum of religion to raise awareness among Tunisians around issues of religious diversity. This museum can give attention to heightening public awareness and enhancing difference understanding, and thus a religious and social coexistence.

#### **4.1.8.2. An Invaluable Contribution of Religious Minorities in Religious Art**

Jewish and Christians have fully contributed in developing Tunisian art and culture; they left their mark in plastic, musical, and culinary arts as well as in theatre, cinema, sculpting, architecture, and literature. In the twenties, the religious feeling takes in Tunisia a remarkable orientation and art turned into a form expression that mirrors spirituality and religiosity. After the trend of religious architecture, painting and sculpture followed the same path, thus leaving the classic intellectual dimension and taking a religious significance. In that period, various religious themes have emerged, reflecting a dimension more sensitive and less abstract and intellectual such as sentimental attachment to the faith, expressions of piety, religious and emotional experience, and moral concerns. Religious Painting and sculpture has been of great

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<sup>866</sup> Denying the faith publicly and rejecting Islam as religion.

interest for Jewish artist Maurice Bismuth who produced about 2000 paintings, among which is the famous painting “Rabbins a la Ghriba”.<sup>867</sup> In 1949, Pierre Boucherle founded the art School of Tunis that certified artistes of all faiths such as Moses Levy, Ammar Farhat, Nello Levy, Edgard Naccache, Bochieri, and Lellouche, which flourished after rejoining Hedi Turki, Zoubeir Turki, Ali Bellagha, Safia Farhat, Brahim Dhahak, Fathi Ben Zakour and Hassen Soufy to this artistic movement. Spiritual peace has been a highly sensitive issue covered in their works, especially that of Jallel ben Abdallah, who has a keen interest in expressing directly through the art itself the religious enjoyment, spirituality, and asceticism. In “*Shared Holy Places*”, Curators have relied on religious paintings to compensate for the lack of religious objects needed to materialize spiritual themes but more importantly to provide knowledge in an interbreeding of religious and artistic dimensions. Such museographic methods was highly appealing to visitors and increased their understanding and satisfaction, which leads to say that religious painting and sculpture should be essentials components in a museum of religion. It improved the understanding of religious phenomenon and gave opportunity to all religious communities to express, through art, their spirituality.

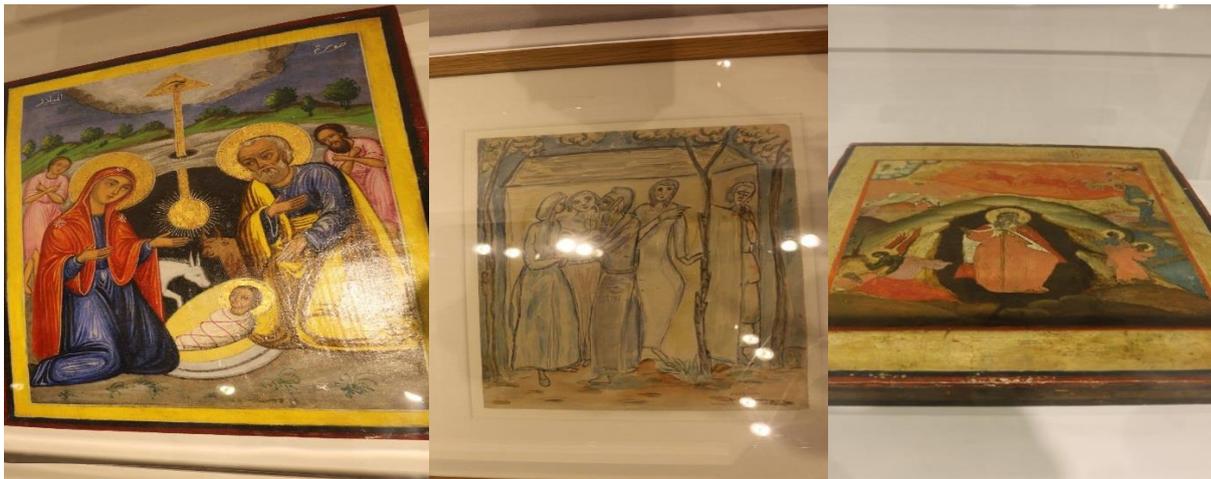


Figure 43. Religious painting, one of the key assets of “*Shared Holy Places*” to transmit knowledge. ©Hamdouni

Moreover, Tunisian Jewish and Christian musical traditions are extremely rich in terms of liturgical music. For instance, the religious poetry (piyyutim) that categorize mystical movements represents one of the distinctive emblems of Jewish liturgical chants in synagogue.<sup>868</sup> These liturgical songs were used in “*Shared Holy Place*” as sound supports to improve the exhibition scenario and to create a sense of emotional tranquillity in the showrooms. This liturgical acoustic has been a highlight that produced a peaceful spiritual

<sup>867</sup> Les peintures des juifs tunisiens, retrieved 15.11.2018 *Bismouth*, [https://harissa.com/D\\_Arts/bismouth.htm](https://harissa.com/D_Arts/bismouth.htm),

<sup>868</sup> Roten, H. (1998). *Musiques liturgiques juives: parcours et escales*. Actes sud, p 1-168.

experience and mystic atmosphere that facilitated assimilation and dissemination of knowledge. My proposal is that this religious oral memory should not only be used as sound supports but deserve to be exhibited in form of video and audio sequences before being definitely lost.

In the context of checking the hypothesis (8) that, in Tunisia, it is a question of “structure tolerance” rather than a religious coexistence and a museum of religion may positively influence this attitude, the KMO index is of good quality with a value of 0.841, exceeding the threshold of 0.7. As a result, the items used in the analysis are factorizable and adequately reflect the need of the museum of religion to enhance the understanding of tolerance and coexistence values. The analysis of variance shows that the items of this scale explain 86.882% of the total variance. These items form a single factorial axis, making it possible to highlight the uni-dimensionality of the scale of measurement. This figure goes along with my hypothesis that that in Tunisia, it is a question of “structure tolerance” rather than a religious coexistence, and a museum of religion may positively influence this attitude.

In sum, the PCA applied across the study’s scale shows that the results are statistically significant and ascertain a good choice of scales. This analysis allowed me to check their uni-dimensionality. Therefore, I conclude that the studied scales correctly reflect the success of the concept of “*Shared Holy Places*” and the feasibility of a large prototype in Tunisia. The cognitive psychology, religious conviction, popular imagination, mentality, and religious patrimonial richness are in favour of creating of a museum of religion in Tunisia. Thus, my proposal to conceive a museum of religion in Tunisia is realistic and attainable and can be a great asset for a better social and religious understanding and more importantly to spread a culture of dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

5. Relationship Between Scales:

In order to demonstrate empirical relationships of significant dependence between the different scales of measurements used in my study, I calculate the correlation coefficients contained in the following table:

		Perceived Quality	Perceived value	Visitors' satisfaction and concept's acceptance	Employed approach and its impact on building loyalty	The effectiveness of a MOR in developing visitors' religious knowledge	The religious heritage and objects' sacredness in Tunisian museums	The feasibility and the chance of success of MOR in Tunisia	Tolerance and Minorities in Tunisia
Perceived Quality	Pearson correlation Sig. (bilateral)	1							
Perceived value	Pearson correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.979** .000	1						
Visitors' satisfaction and concept's acceptance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.981** .000	.980** .000	1					
Employed approach and its impact on building loyalty	Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.956** .000	.965** .000	.963** .000	1				
The effectiveness of a MOR in developing visitors' religious knowledge	Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.958** .000	.939** .000	.953** .000	.898** .000	1			
The religious heritage and objects' sacredness in Tunisian museums	Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.969** .000	.968** .000	.969** .000	.974** .000	.946** .000	1		
The feasibility and the chance of success of MOR in Tunisia	Pearson Correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.969** .000	.971** .000	.970** .000	.963** .000	.933** .000	.987** .000	1	
Tolerance and Minorities in Tunisia	Pearson correlation Sig. (bilateral)	.950** .000	.922** .000	.940** .000	.904** .000	.982** .000	.948** .000	.919** .000	1

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Table 7: The relation between scales

The results show that there are significant dependency relationships of different scales with the scale of visitors' satisfaction. Therefore, based on the final analysis, I can unequivocally state that the perceived quality (PQ) with a coefficient of (0.981), the perceived value (PV) with a coefficient of (0.980) and the Loyalty (L) with a coefficient of (0.963) have significantly influenced the satisfaction experienced by visitors in "Shared Holy Places".

It has been possible to confirm the influence of the variables of perceived quality (PQ), perceived value (PV), and the Loyalty (L) in improving visitors' religious experience and consequently ensuring satisfaction and retention.

The relationship between these variables and satisfaction can be represented as follows:

$$VS = \alpha + \beta_1 * L + \beta_2 * PQ + \beta_3 * PV$$

The results of the impact of these variables (L, PQ, and PV) on visitor satisfaction (VS) are as follows:

ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model		Sum of squares	Ddl	Average squares	F	Sig.
1	Regression	291,126	3	97,042	3648,183	,000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residue	7,874	296	,027		
	Total	299,000	299			

A-Predicted values: (constants) Perceived quality, perceived value, employed approach

B. Dependent Variable: visitors' satisfaction in religious exhibition

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
		A	Standard Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5,547E-16	,009		,000	1,000
	Percieved quality	,475	,048	,475	9,998	,000
	Percieved value	,335	,053	,335	6,325	,000
	Loyalty	,186	,037	,186	5,078	,000

A-Dependent Variable: Visitors' satisfaction in religious exhibition

Table 8. Impact of the variables (L, PQ, and PV) on visitor satisfaction

This table presents the result of the estimation of the linear relationship between visitors' satisfaction variable and the explanatory variables. It is therefore remarkable through this table that the coefficients of the explanatory variables PQ, PV, and L display respectively t-value of

9.998, 6.325, and 5.078, that are all above the 1.96 threshold, which leads to say that these variables have a significant impact on visitors' satisfaction.

Moreover, I established that these three components represented a key driver that has improved visitors' satisfaction and acceptance for the concept employed in the religious exposure. Therefore, these factors should be considered when conceiving a museum of religion to fit with Tunisians' expectation and ensure accordance with their religious traditions and convictions. "*Shared Holy Places*" represented a first museum expression that brought another perspective on displaying religious heritage which goes beyond its material, aesthetic, and artistic qualities visible in history and art museums but rather focused on spiritual meaning, usage, and gestures attached to objects and displayed religious and devotional sensibilities of every religious group. This approach differed from common perspectives in Tunisian museums that simply shed light on religious heritage's architectural and material dimensions; on the contrary, it has unearthed heritage's immaterial dimension which has been rewarding for visitors' knowledge in terms of religious meaning, practices, and sensibilities. It is for this very reason that the museum of religion should focus on displaying the immaterial dimension of religious heritage for three main reasons:

- Firstly, it does not make any sense to repeat a same concept (material dimension) already present in history museums (Bardo, Sousse, Nabel).
- Secondly, the Tunisian public does not have sufficient religious culture and reading tools to understand others' beliefs and practices, and focusing on immaterial heritage makes the museum a centre of interpretation that explains and clarifies this dimension to the audience.
- Thirdly, this innovative approach used in "*Shared Holy Places*" has been of great success, and there is no point in changing a winning standpoint.

Another very important point, the scenographic and museographic innovation, diversification of mediation tools, heterogeneity of the contents, and relying on religious painting, sculpture, image, video, reportage, and testimonials have improved the perceived quality of the exhibition scenario and consequently boosted the perceived value of the visit, contributed to the richness of the experience, and thus provided a positive satisfaction. These strengths and assets must be given consideration when conceiving a museum of religion to maintain the quality of exhibiting religious heritage, and why not to improve upon them.

The linear relationship between the scale variables attest the feasibility of a museum of religion in Tunisia as a house of memory and a centre of interpretation that firstly explores the intangible dimension of religious heritage, urgently protects religious objects from theft, and, more importantly, save practices and tradition from oblivion. For instance, in 2017, the authorities arrested an art dealer and seized a unique Torah manuscript of 37 meters long and 47cm wide, handwritten on the skin of a calf and dating from the 15th century. This dealer planned to illegally export this rare sacred object abroad.



Figure 44 Seized Torah, press conference ministry of interior, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-photos-manuscrit-de-torah-unique-monde-decouvert-saisi/> 18.03.2017

Jewish and Christian religious heritage (material/immaterial) is in imminent danger due to a decreased of number of faithful who moved elsewhere. Such spiritual richness needs to be preserved and communicated to the public through a project of a museum to educate the public about Tunisia's religious diversity, eliminate prejudices leading to discrimination, and develop understanding and tolerance. With the aim of improving religious understanding, the key issues of the concept will be displaying religious expression and sensibilities to resource a common religious memory linking all religious groups. The essence of such a project is questioning prejudices and popular misconceptions in order to foster otherness acceptance. The concept will not be rooted in a historical perspective but rather in a comprehensive approach that displays specificities of Tunisian Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and more importantly the "*Tunisification*" or modification of religious tradition in Tunisian common culture. It will display the characteristics of a Tunisian "reformed Judaism"<sup>869</sup> marked by distinguishing specificities of a moderate Mediterranean Judaism fitted with Andalusian and Middle Eastern influences, displaying characteristics of religious confraternity in Tunisian Christianity and Islam (asceticism). The museum should display and explain the significance of rites of entry

<sup>869</sup> Pouessel 2012, p. 143-160.

such as baptism or circumcision, the rites of passage such as communion or bar- Mitzvah that consist of significant components in others' beliefs which are unknown to most Tunisians and deserves a place in a museum of religion. As requested by several visitors, this museum should also pay attention to some common practices borrowed from Amazigh's beliefs, which are still visible in present-day culture. Despite their small size, Amazigh beliefs, as the Bahaimism creed, represent living religious tradition in Tunisia and deserve a place in a museum of religion. The concept should not be exclusive and should deal with religions equally in accordance with dignity and respect for values. The genuine religious diversity of Tunisia is a synthesis of Amazigh, Punic, and Roman, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Bahaimism beliefs mixed with ottoman and French cultures that led to shape different revealing identities. Plurality and religious sensibilities should no longer be an illusion, and the time has come to face Tunisian authoritarianism by unencumbered displaying of this diversity in museums. From now on, I believe that the struggle for recognition turns into a struggle for religious coexistence, and thus through culture.

Religion does not represent an obstacle for coexistence, but following the ongoing geopolitical landscape's adjustment, religion has become an increasingly discussed topic in Tunisia, and its diversity created new problems with the advent of new worships and the strengthening of other in a secular state that promises equality, freedom, and respect to all citizens. Is it not time for the state to ensure coexistence between different cultures and religions before focusing on boosting national and citizen belonging?

#### IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia

The previous chapters have provided me with all necessary information to identify key challenges of exhibiting religions in Tunisian museums and recognize the pedagogical, museological, and museographic inaccuracies in actual religious exposure. They allowed me to explore the preferences, expectations, and criticisms of Tunisian visitors when it comes to dealing with religions in a museum. The collected data is an important tool to address more closely the issue of exhibitions' religious objects within museums and shape a concept optimally tailored for Tunisian minds and museography's advancements. At present, it is inappropriate to conceive a museum as done in the 1930s because present-day priorities, strategies, and mediation evolved in order to adapt to changing circumstances, entice visitors, and encourage reflection.<sup>870</sup> Museums should no longer stimulate only the interest of elites but rather tackle, represent, and query the full spectrum of society to achieve a social harmony in which everyone can feel they are taking part.<sup>871</sup> The classic model "*museum-temple*"<sup>872</sup> based on narrative discourse is inaccurate or no longer up to date and made way for "*museum-forum*" charged with discussion of heart-wrenching religious and social issues. When it comes to religion, a museum has to be a dynamic space and a tool for strengthening understanding, commitment, acceptance, and maintaining social stability. It should allow a cross-fertilization of ideas and experience that assert and strengthen identities and focus on highlighting the temporal continuity of religious significance and successive senses of objects instead of tracing their biography, which is among the most difficult parts of the whole process. It should provide visitors with devices of existential creativity and create links and situation with religious concepts and objects. In Tunisia, a museum of religion should be an "*activist-museum*" and a discursive space charged with dialogism, empathy, and existential and experiential combinations. Fiona Cameron preferred to call the museums that try to meet expectations of today's society and tackle different positions on actual issues as well as identity and difference a "liquid museum".<sup>873</sup>

This stance stood against the idea of a solid museum (traditional) that does not involve society and promoted the image of a connected place that constantly changes to adapt social environment through up to date exposure. This requires a constant revision of museums'

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<sup>870</sup> Bertin, M. (2015). *Penser soi et penser l'autre à travers les dispositifs de présentation du musée de l'Homme et leur 1 évolution*, Paris : École du Louvre, p. 7-20.

<sup>871</sup> Rasse, P. (1999). *Les musées à la lumière de l'espace public: histoire, évolution, enjeux*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 175.

<sup>872</sup> Cameron, D. F. (1971). *The museum, a temple or the forum?* Curator, 14 (1), p. 11-24.

<sup>873</sup> Cameron, F. (2015). *The liquid museum: new institutional ontologies for a complex, uncertain world*. The international handbooks of museum studies, p. 345.

groundwork through a new critical perspective on its content, outreach, and individuals implication to be able to tackle society transformation and bring new challenges to museums.<sup>874</sup>

A museum of religion should not only exhibit but rather lead, showing positive trends as well as conflict by exploring continuities and discontinuities. It should have a social activist component that tackles ever-changing social and religious structures, provides better insight into religious significance and symbolism, triggers reflections on reality, and encourages discovering other spiritual experiences. It should challenge philosophical and religious certainty, stimulate questions, cast doubt on validities, and build temporal circularity and discursive constructions (multi-semiotic and multi-enunciative) instead of only providing answers. Unlike actual museums dealing with religion in Tunisia, my proposal attaches much importance to spirituality, religious memory and imaginary, and combines it with material values to be able to create meanings. My proposal does not belong to the rank of “*museum-object*” but to the rank of “*museum-discourse*” that takes a stand and creates meaning to secure religious difference. Explaining the whys and wherefores and accepting discussing them is the first step toward the affirmation of various identities. Therefore, a museum of religion should be a tool of power that questions, addresses, seeks, creates, but most importantly deconstructs and constructs meanings to be able to establish commitment with the society.

My concept will not be essentially oriented toward the past and will attach a good deal of importance to contemporary dynamics of religious convictions, practices, and paramount concerns of Tunisian society. Its primary purpose is to make the multi-ethnic and multi-faith diversity comprehensible for non-specialized public and not only in a historical context but rather in a broader social and political context. To this end, two components are essential: an original concept with an attractive and stimulating discourse that stimulates critical thinking and civic-mindedness without offending religious sensitivities, and a rich content capable of seducing visitors with different levels of expertise and expectations. If my concept aims to broaden understanding on religion, it should create an exchange of knowledge and encounters between visitors and information and avoid the undertone and unspoken in its narrative. The scenario of the exposure should facilitate the interaction between visitors and exhibits and ensure them a cognitive, emotional, and social enrichment. This fastidious task requires thoroughness accuracy and precision, since although beliefs and traditions have common principles and similar moral code of conduct, each one provides particular symbols (signs, colours, sayings, and formulas) that distinguishes it from the others. It is then important to pay

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<sup>874</sup> Goncalves, J. (2019). *The “liquid museum”: a relational museum that seeks to adapt to today’s society*, university of Lisbon, p. 4.

attention to properly interpret their significances since it is only through learning particularities that is possible to achieve a genuine understanding of religion. C. Geertz claims, “*It is only through the knowledge of details that we can progress beyond the banal generalities suggested by common sense*”.<sup>875</sup> Religious traces require interpretation to give items meaning and identity because each religious act, ritual, ceremony, property, and place convey meanings and symbolisms that refer to contexts and conditions.<sup>876</sup> The object itself does not reveal much but it has an equivocal nature that encloses a multitude of symbols and traces.<sup>877</sup>

This enormous immaterial potential is very complex to materialize and requires much consideration to provide a renewed insight and new ways of interpretation. The most challenging task in my proposal is to appropriately select, juxtapose and interpret objects to build a multifaceted storyline that encourages reflection on religion and stimulates questions about their certainties. This will be even more complicated insofar as erroneous interpretation or improper combination of objects might upset visitors and touch on their sensibilities. Moreover, the critical challenge reminds how to shape the space and mobilize different types of media to produce meaning, offer a better understanding of religion, and create a relational exposure to adopt a postmodern society.

### 1. The Architectural and Expographic Layout of the Museum

In the last decades, museums have become privileged places of architectural expression that attach particular importance on their outer and inner appearance and to be able to attract visitors from afar. The architectural envelope is a valuable functional support for objects given its purely phatic role that establishes, extends, or interrupts the communication. The architectural envelope of a museum of religion should not be arbitrary or unreasonable but rather perceptible and meaningful because its neutralization would suppress the visual environment emanating from the architecture. It is true that the neutralization of the architectural envelope put more attention on objects, but it creates separation, isolation, and confinement. The “*clinical*” style that relies on white walls does not produce meanings, blocks, and trigger boredom. My proposal suggests an architectural envelope that functions in a complementary style with the religious content, contributes to the enrichment of the discourse, and enhances the “*mediatization*”.<sup>878</sup> My empirical study showed that a visible and meaningful architecture and museography

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<sup>875</sup> Geertz, C. (1992). *Observer l’Islam: changement religieux au Maroc et en Indonésie*. Paris, Découvertes, p. 36.

<sup>876</sup> Geertz, C. (1972) *la religion comme système culturel*, in R. E. Bradbury & C. Geertz et al. *Essais d’anthropologie religieuse*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 22-23.

<sup>877</sup> Greenhill 1992, p. 6.

<sup>878</sup> Is a space conceptual organization to supports visitors through material arrangement, Davallon 1999, p. 36.

enhanced the semiotisation and contextualization of religious objects and helped visitors better see, understand, and appreciate the exposure. For this reason, I suggest an architectural layout that favours the interbreeding between religions and highlights the linkages between religious customs, traditions, and practices without forgetting to consider their distinguishing characteristics. I conceived the plans using the building information modelling software Autodesk Revit. An architect helped me design the building structure and components in 3D. The plan draws on three towers and five-floor exhibitions spaces connected in the middle to emphasize the interconnectivity, sharing, and crossing between religions.



*Figure 45 . The architectural drawing of the museum of religion ©Hamdouni*

The exhibition space is not only the area in which visitors move and objects are organized, it also includes the aesthetic and formal qualities since linking both components provide the exposure with more meaning. If the architectural layout has no aesthetic and symbolic meaning, it will not help explaining the cohesion and logical relationship between artifacts. However, when it carries a message of primary importance, it will work in favour of the narrative discourse. This implies that shaping a meaningful and atypical architectural layout for a museum of religion would create a subtle relationship with the topographic, memorial, and religious context of the exhibit, which would challenge the curiosity of the viewer and prompt him to visit the collection.

As explained in chapter II, the reception space is of paramount importance to ensure a smooth and successful visit and make visitors feel more comfortable. I conceived a comfortable and welcoming environment that includes ticketing service, media library, conference room, documentation centre, souvenir shop, restaurant, and a cloakroom to help ensure a positive start of the visit. The museum should work within the logic of self-financing generated by earned

income of conference rooms, a space for workshops and seminars, documentation centre and souvenir shop, and offer cultural programs in synergy with the collection.

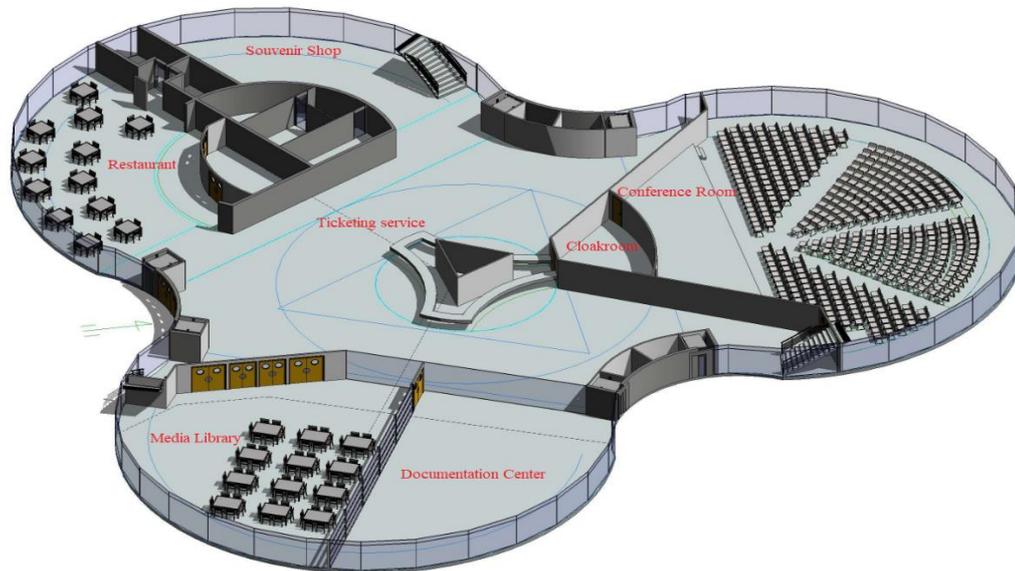


Figure 46. Layout of the ground floor level. ©Hamdouni

The storyline of the exhibition starts from the first floor and sets up an itinerary that connects spaces, objects, and ideas to produce coherent meaning and ensure an intellectual comfort for visitors. The narrative spine sets the logic of the exposure according to a thematic segmentation to allow an unfolding of the visit as a story with transformations, disjunctions, conjunctions, and utterances.<sup>879</sup> My concept does not follow a chronological logic, avoid a separation between religions in space, time, and content, and proposes three showrooms designed in circular shape in every floor to provide visitors with free movement and a wider viewing angle. I suggest there are three topological relationships between the “*expographic envelopes*”: inclusion (one inserted into another), penetration (partial inclusion), and juxtaposition (adjacent and independent of each other). For example, as shown in the figure above, three exhibition halls in the first floor deals with the religious observance in the Abrahamic religion (containing envelope), and each showroom addresses it from a different perspective (range of sequence), and each hall offers an immersive auditorium (multiple unit). The variation of relations between the envelopes boosts the spatial experience and generates semi-symbolic couplings that give the narrative weave a visual storyline that helps visitors understand the thematic and spatial divisions and grasp its significance. I inspired this architectural plan from the main constituent of chromosomes: the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to stress that believing whether in religion,

<sup>879</sup> Drouget, N. (2005). *Du musée au parc d'attraction: ambivalence des formes de l'exposition*, in *Culture et Musées*, n05, p. 71-72.

God, life, or family, future connects all human beings just as DNA, and that religion should bring nations, people, and cultures closer together instead of separating them. This idea of connection and global ethic goes back to the theologian Hans Küng, who claimed that a connection between human beings implies a basic consensus of values and shared norms to build a constructive coexistence. In his book *Weltethos*, Küng stated that a basic understanding of shared values is needed to bring people together regardless of their religion or cultures or ethnics.<sup>880</sup>

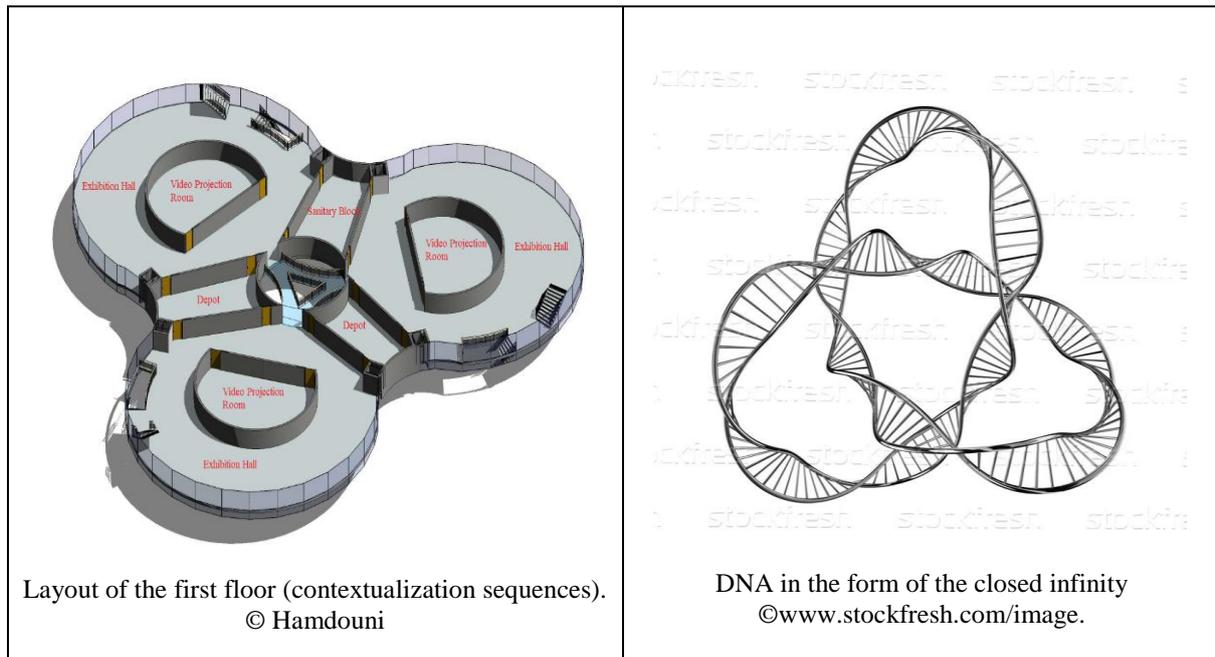


Figure 47. Inspiration of the architectural plan of the museum

Based on my empirical survey findings and visitors' recommendations (Chapter 3.2.7), my concepts primarily address the Abrahamic religions that are poorly explored in Tunisian public collections and puts great emphasis on their spiritual and social dimension instead of dealing with them as historical facts. This is not an exclusive choice that arbitrarily discards ancient religions from the concept but rather a strategic choice that follows the public's suggestion, searches for innovation, and has a recreational aim that avoids repeating existing concepts. Moreover, there are at least 20 archaeological and ethnological museums dealing with former and ancient religion. To remind visitors of the fact that no boundary should exist between religions, the design proposes three showrooms in every floor, connected by a gangway without doors to allow them to have a visual escape in the next hall and get a sense of the following sequences. This interconnectivity powers visitors' curiosity and encourages them to advance in the space that surrounds them. The collection consists of four overarching themes arranged in

<sup>880</sup> Küng, H. (1990). *Projekt weltethos* (Vol. 14). München: Piper, p. 1-196

nine showrooms and each hall contains several sequences. The showrooms have similar architectures but contain different scenography and spatial installations ranging from dominant to associative, dominated, and neutral arrangement. It takes place among four floors (0-3), and the top floors (4-5) are devoted to temporary exhibitions. The first floor displays the contextualization sequences of the collection needed to understand the following sequences and grasp the story line. The scenery, spatial processing, visual, and sound atmospheres change in each floor to give visitors an idea of a topic shift and keep boredom at bay. Similarly, the light atmosphere gradually changes from a dark mood and light shades to lively ambience. This progression in the luminous intensity should reflect a symbolic gradation in concordance with the progress of the narrative and spatial structure. In the last decade, this scenographic technique has integrated many museums dealing with religions, such as that of World Religions in Taipei, and has particularly pleased the visitors.

My concept provides an upward spiral itinerary that allows a smooth narrative succession of sequences, in which the thematic, spatial, and temporal progression are oriented to a bottom-up approach in order to increase suspense on each floor. A sequence title appears at the entrance of each showroom to prepare visitors mentally and emotionally for a new visual storyline.

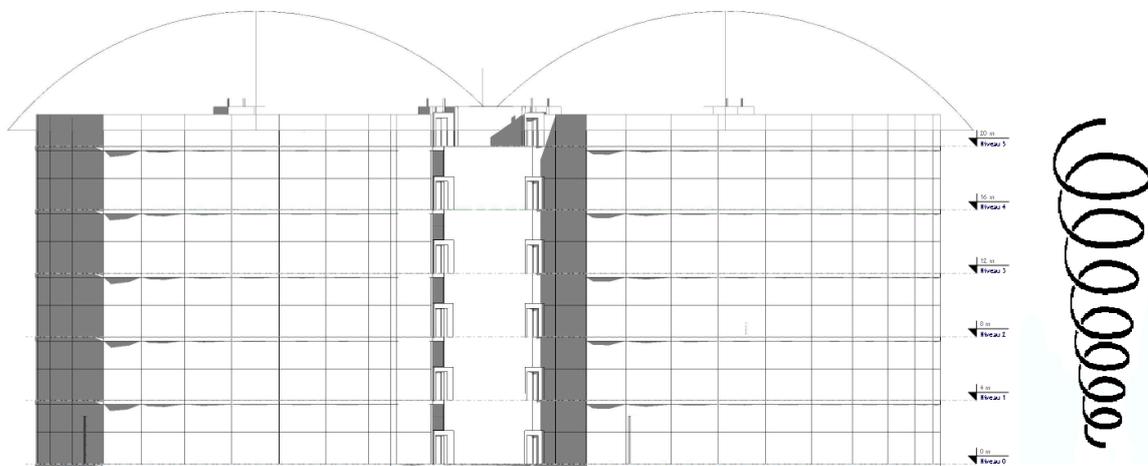


Figure 48. The bottom-up approach and upward spiral itinerary of the exposure. ©Hamdouni

The structural design of the exposure comprises three categories: the most important element are the objects (artifacts), followed by display tools (pedestal, stand, light, and sound), and mediatization tools (labels, texts, photography, animated display board, reconstructed scenes, videos, and scale model). The combination of all these elements reconstitutes a religious ambience required to contextualize artifacts and understand their significance. In that context, it is important to recognize that “Atmospheres” have become an empirical phenomenon and a

valuable concept in empowering meanings.<sup>881</sup> The narrative and spatial structure of the sequences are superimposed and hierarchical in units (scenes), sub-units (ritual), and elements (religious object) so that the interpretive and metonymic aspects take over the analogy, strike connotative or denotative meaning, and help visitors better understand the exhibition's rationale. The construction of meaning occurs through numerous intra-topical relationships between showcase and sub-unit components, which together form the narrative spine of the exposure. Targeted lighting, colour shift, and symbolic sign relay clues on objects' frame of reference and help visitors interpret in the best possible way objects' meanings. This dissemination makes objects both a product of a representative work but also an original referent.<sup>882</sup> Moreover, it provides two discourses: a predominant denoted discourse embedded in texts, images, testimonies, and a hidden discourse reflected in space, blending, and juxtaposition that stimulates reflection, critical thinking, and self-questioning. The double discourse carries two stories of considerable importance: the exposure storyline that largely draws on the stories of religious objects and the diversity of an "*expographic*" arrangement that gives more versatility to the space, more visibility to objects, and more substantive interpretation of meanings. The interpretation does not only rely on reading texts but also draws on the structural organization, intentionality, spatialization, and symbolization of the exhibition.<sup>883</sup> My choice of relying on the decompartmentalization of spaces seeks to give the sequences visual and aesthetic clarity, provides links between the showrooms, and allows visitors build their own path with inquisitive nature and free spirit.

## 2. The Thematic Repartition of the Exposure

The central focus of this concept is providing visitors with clear historical and religious landmarks through a comparatist approach and help them identify the closeness, point of encounter, and proximity between religions without neglecting the particularities of each one. It will devote close attention to the dynamics and richness of their cross-cultural exchanges and contribution to Tunisian heritage whilst not ignoring their points of conflict. The exposure aims to show visitors the diversity of religious observance, practice, and symbols, shed light on popular and communal significance of religious experiences, reflect the plurality of faiths in Tunisia, and explore the spiritual dimension of the human being. Furthermore, the religious blending of the exposure aims to counter negative stereotypical images of religious divide

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<sup>881</sup> Radermacher, M. (2018). „*Atmosphäre*“: Zum Potenzial eines Konzepts für die Religionswissenschaft. *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 26 (1), p. 142-194.

<sup>882</sup> Monpetit, R. (1996). *Une logique d'exposition populaire*. *Publics et Musées*, (9), p. 59-60.

<sup>883</sup> Davallon 1999, p. 99-100.

linked to contemporary political conflicts. It promotes shared heritage and values in order to defuse inter-community conflicts in society and opening up lines of thought about beliefs' validity. The overwhelming majority of selected and assembled religious objects find their origins in Tunisia. I purposely made this choice to create ties between the artifacts and visitors and enhance the national and emotional heritage belonging of the visitors. This choice was not an easy task but definitely worth a try for creating a relational museum. This choice also aims to avoid falling into the problem of giving objects back to their state of origin later on.

The storyline gives more weight to modern and contemporary religious observance, tradition, and customs instead of focusing solely on ancient periods as other religious collections in Tunisia have done. Nevertheless, having said that, given the unfamiliarity of a large portion of the Tunisian public with Judaism and Christianity, the first floor should provide visitors with an extensive overview of the Abrahamic religion, prophets, place of establishment, organization, place of worship, and religious particularities in order to put them in a condition to learn more about other faiths. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are rooted in a mosaic of religion of ancient Israel; however, they are deemed as separate religions, which is from a religious-scientific standpoint inaccurate given their close interlinkage.<sup>884</sup> The figure of Abraham represents the closest link between Judaism (the first Ivrit), Christianity (the Father of believers), and Islam (*"Al Khalil"*/ the friend of god) given that Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are descendants of Abraham. He was the initiator of believing in a unique and universal god, which makes him the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The exposure should emphasize this rapprochement and show visitors that the sharing, social justice, and responsibility toward others started with Abraham who shared his food with strangers and argued for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The exposure should anchor in visitors' spirits that Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad conveyed the same religion based on the worship of god and the dignity of humankind.

### **2.1. The First Floor: Introduction to the Abrahamic Religions**

Jumping directly to blend the religious communities in Tunisia and explore their tradition and reflect their similarities and convergences will be an incorrect pedagogical step and a rushed, if not an unstable, approach. The notion of time is of fundamental importance in the Abrahamic religions. It is not a cyclical time but rather an oriented one with a beginning, a progress, and an expectation of an end. This exposure will maintain this orientation, begin on the first floor with the commencement of the Abrahamic religion, and then deal accurately with their

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<sup>884</sup> Schmitz, B. (2009). *Von der einen Religion des alten Israel zu den drei Religionen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*. W. Kohlhammer Verlag, p. 10-248.

particularities in Tunisia. An informative, concise, and engaging introduction to these faiths is especially required to help visitors become acquainted with their particularities in a later stage. The first floor is the only space of the exhibition that deals with religion separately and devotes to each faith a particular sequence to cause the least amount of disturbance and confusion to visitors as possible and stimulate their interest to discover the other sequences.

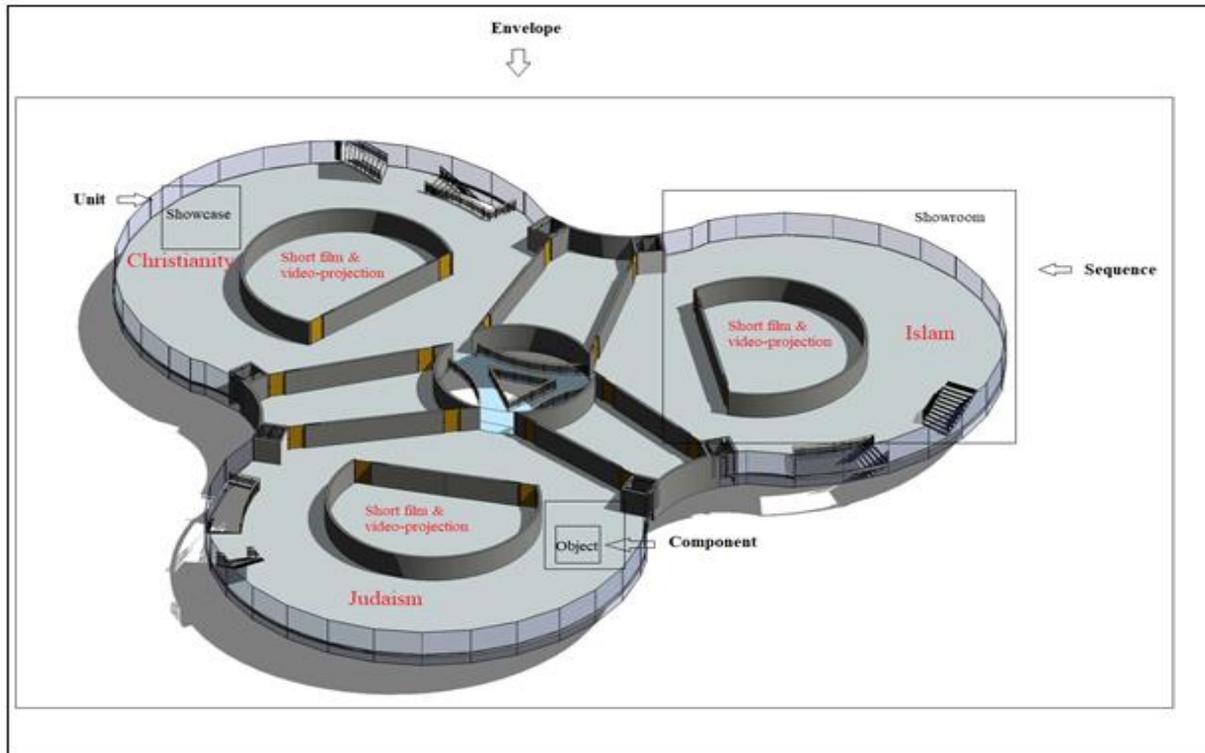


Figure 49. The thematic repartition of the first floor. ©Hamdouni

By adopting such a pedagogical approach, it is preferable to use the “*White cube*” scenography to create an aseptic and contemplative atmosphere and reduce the visual noise. This scenography had broad appeal to visitors of “*Shared Holy Places*” organized in the Bardo Museum because it put great emphasis on objects and offered more stillness to the exposure. In addition, this part of the exposition largely draws on ritual objects, paintings, photographs, panels and text printed on the walls, which require a scenography that does not appear as a neutral space, but rather as an informative historical construction. Explanatory texts will be written in the domestic language (Arabic) and in the second spoken/written language in Tunisia (French) and with an English audio guide for visitors of other nationalities. New generations are digitally oriented and prefer augmented reality and interactive content that improve both the educational and practical aspects of visiting museums. To enhance their immersion in the narrative of the exhibitions, visitors should “*find themselves on the stage and in the*

*scenography, not on the other side of the proscenium*".<sup>885</sup> The use of sounds and videos in museums have abounded over the last two decades because interactive experiences are most of the time remembered, connected with objects, and reproduced.<sup>886</sup> For this reason, my concept will draw on sensory museology that not only focuses on offering meaning and significance but also concentrates on giving feeling and sensation through videos, touchscreens, sounds, and even silence.<sup>887</sup> Every sequence has a different soundscape and a specific visual narrative in order to engage visitors affectively and emotionally and offer them a feeling of time, space, and even sacredness. It is very important to provide visitors with an acoustic comfort in the showrooms and not to exceed sound pressure level (28-35) designed for museums.<sup>888</sup>

##### 2.1.1. Sequence 1: Judaism in Tunisia

The sequence of Judaism spreads over an area of 519 m<sup>2</sup> and splits into two distinct parts: a main showroom composed of six units and covering an area of 418 m<sup>2</sup>, and an immersive room covering an area of 101 m<sup>2</sup> called "*the heir of Abraham*", used to provide visitors with an immersive experience (mapping, short films, and testimonies). A large part of the selected objects belong to the private collections of David Gharbi, Laurence Roux, and to the collection of the Museum of Art and History of Judaism (mahJ) in France. The soundscape of the sequence will be an instrumental track and small vocal recording of "*Baqashot*" which are liturgical songs recited throughout the year before Jewish morning service. Each unit will address a specific topic using different display tools such as religious objects, postcards, mosaics, photographs, engravings, and paintings. Two units will include documentary films to evoke the intangible side of religious objects, worships, testimonies, and achieve critical distance. This sequence includes an introduction to Judaism through the figure of Abraham and Moses and then goes into detail on Tunisian Judaism.

##### Unit 1: Introduction into Judaism

Judaism is a religion or a foundation of religion that draws on the Tanakh, which is the Christian "*Old Testament*", and of which the most important part is the five books of the Torah (Pentateuch).<sup>889</sup> In Judaism, the Torah is the divine teaching transmitted by God to Moses and consists of five books: Genesis (Berēshīt), Exodus (Shemōt), Leviticus (Wayyiqrā), Numbers

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<sup>885</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2015). *A theatre of history: 12 principles*. TDR/The Drama Review, 59(3), p. 58

<sup>886</sup> Kbijsterveld, K., & van Dijck, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Sound souvenirs: Audio technologies, memory and cultural practices* (Vol. 2). Amsterdam University Press, p. 1-5.

<sup>887</sup> Howes, D. (2014). *Introduction to sensory museology*. The Senses and Society, 9 (3), p. 259-267.

<sup>888</sup> The Noise Rating - NR is a measurement scale for acceptable indoor environment for hearing, communication and annoyance developed by the ISO (1973)

<sup>889</sup> Lévinas, E. (2003). *Difficile liberté : Essais sur le judaïsme*, in Albin Michel, Le Livre de Poche p. 47-48.

(Bamidbar), and Deuteronomy (Devarim).<sup>890</sup> It contains 613 commandments and has an oral dimension.<sup>891</sup> It speaks of the origins of the world, creation of man, history of the people of Israel, and their ancestors, including the figure of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (the Patriarchs). Judaism, whose teachings and rites are rooted in the Pentateuch, is imbued with the figure of Moses, to whom the tradition attributes the writing of the Torah. Moses and his ancestor Abraham have high symbolic value for the Israelites for being the initiators of believing in one god. The book of Genesis represents the basis for the iconographic representations of Abraham and his descendants. According to the Jewish tradition, God promised him a land, descendants, and an everlasting blessing, and required in return his departure on his path.<sup>892</sup> He had to leave his place in Haran, to the land of the Canaanites and then to a place named “*Shechem*”. Abraham was a warrior and victorious chief who sought for new alliances and who generated two children: Ismail from his Egyptian servant Agar and Isaac from his wife Sarah. God wanted to put Abraham’s faith to the test by sacrificing Isaac in the land of Moriah, but his lord stopped him from sacrificing his son and replaced him with an animal offering. This unit will be composed of a biblical engraving “*The Sacrifice of Isaac*” and a hand-written manuscript of the Torah seized by the Tunisian authority in an illicit trafficking of art objects. As shown in my empirical study (Chapter 3.2.2), printing religious verses on the showroom’s wall and using glass panels proved to be very effective in improving the perceived quality of the exhibition and therefore represents an essential factor in guaranteeing the perceived value and the satisfaction of visitors. I suggest printing verses from the book of Genesis on the unit’s walls and use glass panels to provide visitors with an insight into the iconographic representations of Abraham and his descendants in the Torah and into the religious crossing between the Abrahamic religions.



Biblical engraving: Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac, France © collection of Laurence Roux



A hand-written manuscript of the Torah written on calfskin. © www.Tunisienumerique.tn

<sup>890</sup> Coggins, R. J. (1990). *Introducing the Old Testament*. Oxford University Press, p. 5-10.

<sup>891</sup> Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts, p. 630.

<sup>892</sup> The book of Genesis 13:16.

### Unit 2: Jews in Tunisia

Jews settle in communities with relative religious and judicial autonomy in which a council manages the administrative matters and a rabbi cares for the worship and religious instruction. These communities were composed of Tunisian Jewish “*Twansa*” and European Jewish “*Grana*” who escaped the religious repression in the 14th century. At first, local laws prohibited Jews from living inside the city of Tunis and could only enter it during the day until the saint “*Sidi Mahrez*” obtained them an authorization of residence.<sup>893</sup> Jewish are skilled craft and trade workers and worked overwhelmingly as blacksmiths, tailors, dyers, shoemakers, and jewellers. In 1946, the Jewish community already numbered 100,000 citizens, of which 70,971 were of Tunisian nationality and the rest from France, Italy, and Britain.<sup>894</sup> These communities were of unequal weight and different status, ranging from recognized communities managed by an elected council such as Tunis Sousse, Sfax, and Bizerte and customary structures managed by an administrative committee appointed by public authority. They lived in a residential district called Hara and maintained stable and lasting relations with each other and with Muslims. However, the lack of recognition caused their diaspora, which made the community decrease to 1,500 individuals in 2003, less than 0.1% of the total population.

This unit will draw on six photographs, an oil canvas painting, and a drawing to explain to visitors that the Jews’ presence in Tunisia goes back to the Punic era and their settlements were all over the country, from east to west and north to south. A three-minute documentary film retracing the arrival of the Jews in Tunisia and the history and traces of the community from antiquity to the contemporary period will be projected on a vertically arranged screen which takes into account the organization of the space and visitors’ ergonomics. Animated pictures help see properly and understand adequately. It has been proven that to improve the spatial awareness within exhibitions, it is important that visual and auditory awareness work together to create a better holistic picture.<sup>895</sup> Animated videos, documentaries, and testimonies used in “*Shared Holy Places*” gave a new breath to the exposure, revitalized the space, pleased the visitors, and increased their understanding. Thence, unit 2 will include a video to add conviviality, interactivity, and multi-sensoriality to the storytelling. It is important to stress that the video will contains only an instrumental audio sequence and will not exceed 15 in the sound pressure level to prevent triggering a sound disturbance.

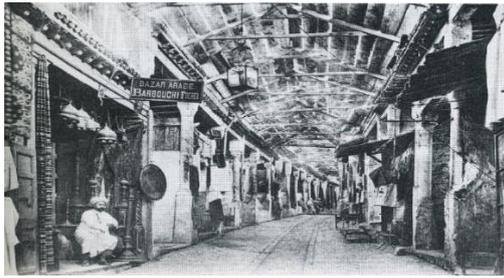
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<sup>893</sup> Cazes, D. (1889). *Essai sur l’histoire des israélites de Tunisie*, Paris, p. 75-78.

<sup>894</sup> Allali, J. P., & al. (2005) *Les juifs de Tunisie: Images et textes*, Editions sociales, p. 65.

<sup>895</sup> Blesser, B., & Salter, L. R. (2007) *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* Experiencing Aural Architecture, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, p. 44.

IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia



Jewish district of embroiderer “*Souk El trouk*”, Tunis  
© J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



Jewish district for hardware stores “*Souk el-Gnrana*”  
© J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



Jewish women in Tunis © J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



Jewish cemetery in Nabeul. © J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



Jewish village Ebba Ksour in El kef © J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



A Jewish family from south Tunisia © J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



An oil canvas painting of the Jewish district la Hara.  
©Nello levy Les juifs de Tunisie 2005



A drawing of a Jewish house in El kef © J. P. Allali Les juifs de Tunisie 2005

**Unit 3: Jewish Place of worship**

The synagogue is the Jewish religious, spiritual, teaching, and meeting venue. The Israelites call it "sallat" or "Beit Knesset", and Muslims call it "Jama al-Yahud". The concepts dates back to the times of the prophets and their disciples and it serves to hold the prayers of persons of Jewish confession.<sup>896</sup> This gathering place originally had not a sacred character; however, it acquired it over time and becomes a representative and primordial element for Judaism.<sup>897</sup> It became over time a space for teaching of Jewish tradition, Hebrew language, and learning the Talmud and Torah, whether for children or adults. Its dimension, shape, and architecture depend on the community's size and provenance. It contains mainly a prayer hall, a "Hékhal" for the sacred laws roller, and a "bimah" for Torah reading. In Tunisia, nearly 80 synagogues have been erected, the oldest one dates back to the fourth century (the city of Naro), though dozens of them have collapsed and only few survive. El kef and Djerba synagogues bear the same name "El Ghriba" and represent the most visited place of pilgrimage in the country.<sup>898</sup>

This unit will be composed of two prayer books, four postcards, three photographs and a gouache and acrylic paint. The prayer books and postcards will be displayed in separate showcases; the photographs will be printed with their text and description on the walls. The gouache and the acrylic paint will be hung on the wall, as was the case in "Shared Holy Places" in the Bardo Museum.



Judaica (Yalde Yosef), synoagogue of Djerba, tunisia, 1919. © Collection of David Gharbi.



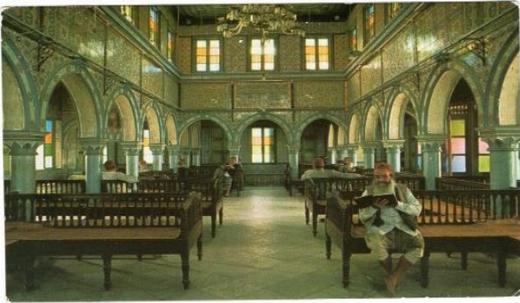
Prayer book for Shabbat, Tunisia, 1946, © Collection of David Gharbi.

<sup>896</sup> Isaiah 8:16

<sup>897</sup> Iogna-Prat, D., & Veinstein, G. (2005). *Lieux de culte, lieux saints dans le judaïsme, le christianisme et l'islam*. Revue de l'histoire des religions, p. 387-391

<sup>898</sup> Saadaoui, A. (1999) *Les synagogues de Tunisie : recherches architecturales*, in Histoire communautaire, histoire plurielle : la communauté juive de Tunisie, CPU, Tunis, p. 190.

IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia



Postcard of Djerba synagogue, 21th century, Tunisia,  
© collection of David Gharbi, real photo C.A. P,  
Paris.



Postcard of great synagogue of Tunis, 1933  
© collection of David Gharbi, real photo C.A.P, Paris



Postcard of Ben Gerdane's synagogue, 20th century,  
Tunisia, © private collection of David Gharbi



Postcard of Djerba's synagogue with its stamp, 21th  
century, Tunisia, © private collection of Ahlem  
Hegagi



The synagogue of el kef © J. P. Allali



The synagogue of La Hara. © J. P. Allali



The Beth-El Synagogue of Sfax © J. P. Allali



A gouache and acrylic paint of Jewish religious scene  
paint by Lisa Seror. © J. P. Allali

**Unit4: Jewish Religious Symbols and Significance**

There are four symbols of great importance to understand the Jewish religion: The Magen David, the Menorah, the Sepher Torah, and the Synagogue. It is true that the Jewish faith is rooted in the Torah, but it is also the set of notions, interpretations, concepts, and comments gathered in a book of oral tradition called Talmud. The seven-branched candlestick is the oldest and most important symbol of Judaism since it symbolizes God’s presence and has been mentioned several times in the book of Exodus.<sup>899</sup> Unlike the menorah, the six-pointed star appeared late and symbolizes protection and safety. It reminds King David who affixed it on his shield for divine protection during his battles. With the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the Star of David became the symbol of Israel and is featured on the national flag. In Tunisia, Jewish life abounds in religious symbols: The “*Hamsah*”, fish, coral horn, and Star of David are the most important symbols to recognize on Jews’ clothes, jewels, dwellings, and shops. These objects belong to a repertoire closely related to traditional Jewish iconography, but also adapted to the Jewish magic world. This unit will be composed of a Talmud, plate with the Star of David, and four decorative jewellerys with religious symbols that stress the importance of these symbols in Jews’ popular imagination.



Wedding crown consisting of five elements with hand-shaped pendants. Tunisia, 20th century ©MahJ



Chest buckle with hexagram symbols, Tunisia, Djerba, 20th century © J. P. Allali



Silver jewellery with the star of David and Khomsa, Tunisia 21 century © collection of David Gharbi



Necklace made of nine pendants (stylized hands and stars of David) Djerba, 19th century. © MahJ

<sup>899</sup> Book of Exodus chapter 25, verses 31 to 401.



Moulded bottom plate with Star of David, candlestick, Hebrew inscription, Tunisia, 20th century ©MahJ



Talmud Mishnah, Tunisia, 21st century © collection of David Gharbi

### Unit 5: Jewish Apotropaic Objects

Tunisian Jews give prominent place to healing and protecting rituals, symbols, and objects against the evil eye embedded in gaze, word, and thought of envious and jealous persons. According to Jewish popular traditions, the amulets have a prophylactic prevention function that protect the person wearing them harm and “evil eye” (chhorr). These amulets should protect their bearers, in particular women and children, but also should bring success in business. Up until the 19th century, the printed or written word on paper amulets were very popular in Tunisian Jewish tradition, but over time, Jews attached great importance to jewelled amulets just as their Muslim neighbours. All kinds of Jewish jewels, whether bracelets, necklaces or anklets, may have protective and apotropaic power, in particular when they contain the extended hand called “Hamsah”.<sup>900</sup> These amulets take geometric shapes such as the square that recalls the “magic square”, triangle, two intertwined equilateral triangles (star of David ), plants shapes such as the palm branch (sign of victory and eternity), or animal shape such as a fish (sign of fertility). Amulets that take up biblical episodes and contain hero scenes and their name in the text of the amulet are rare to find in Tunisia. Jewish amulets hold over twenty types of different functions and significance.<sup>901</sup> They are either a mere object or a montage of several elements. They consist predominantly of silver or gilt metal plate engraved with a stylized decoration and an inscription in Hebrew. It is important to underline that the aesthetics plays an essential role in the manufacturing of Jewish amulets, in particular the elegance of the calligraphy of the Hebrew inscription. For this reason, Tunisian manufacturers of amulets used

<sup>900</sup> Sabar, S. (2015). *L’art des amulettes juives*, in Gideon Bohak, ed., *Magie. Anges et démons dans la tradition juive: Exhibition Catalog*, p. 74.

<sup>901</sup> Vassel, E. (1907). *La littérature populaire des Israélites Tunisiens*. Leroux, p.1- 276.

the micrography to draw attractive patterns of tiny Hebrew letters. In Tunisia, the main large production and sale areas for these amulets are Houmet Souk in Djerba and the souk of Tunis in the medina.

This unit will be composed of twelve Jewish amulets in order to shed light on the prominent place given to protection rituals and popular beliefs and everyday behavior. It displays twelve amulets with different forms, components, and functions.<sup>902</sup> It will also include two photographs and a painting of Jewish jewellery stores in Houmet Souk, which are mainly specialized in designing amulets for Jews but also for Muslims.

 <p>Amulet in the shape of a heart, engraved in Hebrew, Tunisia, 20th century. © MahJ</p>	 <p>Silver rectangular amulet, engraved in Hebrew, Tunisia, 20th century. © MahJ</p>
 <p>Silver plate Amulet, engraved in Hebrew, Tunisia, 20th century. ©MahJ</p>	 <p>Stylized "Hamsah" amulet moulded with letters in Hebrew. © MahJ</p>
 <p>Engraved and openwork silver amulet in the form of "Hamsah", Tunisia, 20th century. © MahJ</p>	 <p>Engraved and openwork gilt metal amulet in the form of "Hamsah", Tunisia, 20th century. © MahJ</p>

<sup>902</sup> The pictures of these amulets are retrieved from the web site of Museum of Art and History of Judaism in France on 24.10.2019 from <https://www.mahj.org/en/>

 <p>Square amulet with religious formula in Hebrew characters, North Africa 20th century © MahJ</p>	 <p>An amulet made from a fragment of bone with fastening ring, Tunisia, Djerba, 20th century © MahJ</p>
 <p>A pin-shaped amulet made of a black horn and three chains ending with "Hamsah", Tunisia, Djerba, 20th century © MahJ</p>	 <p>A miscellaneous amulet with metal, carnelian, horn, beads, chains, coins. Tunisia, Djerba, 20th century © MahJ</p>
 <p>A red cotton rectangular amulet with different elements (hand and bead), Tunisia, 20th century © MahJ</p>	 <p>Leather amulet with rounded buttons surrounded by red beads, Tunisia, 20th century © MahJ</p>

### Unit 6: Jewish Ritualistic Objects and Judaica

Jewish practice involves a number of ritual objects and Judaica, which are not all equal in terms of sacredness. These objects and clothes are for individual use such as the *Tzitzit* (knotted ritual tassels) or for collective use such as the Torah scroll and its accessories, mainly stored in the holiest spot of the synagogue (the Torah ark). The Crown of Torah also acquired over time a certain sacredness since it augments the Torah's status and associates it with royalty and centrality in Jewish life.

Most of the Jewish ritual objects are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible except the nine-branch candelabra and the *kippah* because of their late immergence. The Torah scrolls, *menorah*, and the *mezuzah*, which is a Holster for Torah verses that aims to fulfil the mitzvah and oft affixed to the doorpost of houses have a particular importance in the Judaica. According to halakha, Jewish should affix the mezuzah on the right side in the upper third of the door or doorpost. One of the most important ritual objects in the synagogue are the *kippah*, which is a skullcap worn largely by men during Jewish rituals and the ritual pointer *Yad* used to follow the text during the Torah reading. The ritual pointer ensures that the faithful does not touch or bring impurities to the holy parchment. The Shofar, which is a ram's horn used during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to recal Abraham's sacrifice and the Tefillin, which are two wooden boxes, filled with verses written on parchment, and are of a fundamental importance in the Jewish tradition.

This unit will be composed of Torah and Esther scrolls, Torah pointer, crown of Torah, shofar, box for citron, religious Lampe with eight burners, mezuzah, and photographs showing people using these ritual objects. Unit (6) will be enhanced with a documentary and testimonies of Jewish rabis to give visitors an overview on unexhibited sacred objects of Tunisian Judaism.

 <p>Torah scroll, Mediterranean Basin, 18th century / 19th century, ©MahJ</p>	 <p>Esther scroll (twenty-first book of the Hebrew Bible), North Africa, 17th century. © MahJ</p>
 <p>"Yad" Torah pointer, Tunisia, 20th century, ©MahJ.</p>	 <p>Crown of Torah, North Africa, 1871, © MahJ.</p>



Shofar, ram horn trunk, North Africa, first half of the 20th century, ©MahJ



Etrog<sup>903</sup> Box for citron, Djerba, 21st century © collection of David Gharbi



Religious Lampe with eight burners used in Hanukkah celebration, Tunisia, 19th century. ©MahJ



Mezuzah, Holster for Torah verses, North Africa, 20th century ©MahJ.



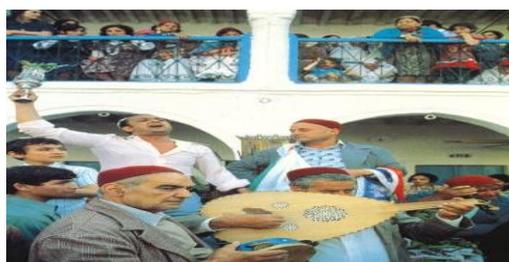
Mezuzah affixed on the right side of Jewish restaurant door, la Goulette, Tunisia © Thierry Brésillon., www.nouvelobs.com



An eternal lamp series that recalls the eternal presence of God, synagogue of Djerba, 2009 Tunisia, © Hamdouni



Tunisian rabbi Attoughi reading the Torah, Djerba synagogue, 2016 © Fethi Belaid / AFP



Auction of objects to decorate the menorah, synagogue of Djerba ©Gilles Cohen

<sup>903</sup> Is symbolic citron used in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

### Unit 7: The Heir of Abraham, Moses (Immersive Room)

Given their significance in the Qur'an and the Hadiths, the history of the prophets represents a highly important topic for Tunisian visitors. Such narrative represents a key part of the immersive space of the exposition, in particular when it deals with the oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt and their liberation through Moses. The immersive room will tackle this topic through interactive displays of tools such as video projections, short films (biographical), 3D video mapping, and touch panels in order to provide visitors with an overview into the book of Exodus. It will draw the figure of Moses starting from his birth, his confrontation with the Pharaoh, crossing the Red Sea, wandering in the desert, Sinai Covenant, and his death. Touch panels will allow visitors, in particular the younger generation such as pupils, to scroll photographs of artistic masterpieces that deals with Moses:

- Moses, painted by José de Ribera (1638)
- Moses saved from the waters, painted by Sébastien Bourdon (around 1650)
- Moses holding the tables of the law, painted by Guido Reni (1624) in the Borghese Gallery

#### 2.1.2. Sequence 2: Christianity in Tunisia

The sequence of Christianity has the same size of the Judaism sequence and splits into two distinct parts: a main showroom composed of six units, and a projection room called “*The heir of Abraham*” to provide visitors with an immersive experience (mapping, short films, and testimonies). Each unit will address a specific topic using different display tools such as religious objects, picture postcards, terracotta tile, mosaics, photographs, and engraving. A large part of the selected objects belong to Giuseppe Peluso and Vebrunia Aras who are two Sicilian Christians living in Tunisia. The soundscape of the sequence will be an instrumental track and small vocal recording in Arabic of Psalms for the third millennium performed by Marie Keyrouz.<sup>904</sup> Two units will include documentary films and testimonies to reveal the intangible and hidden side of religious objects, worships, testimonies, enhance the perceived quality, and achieve interactivity and critical distance. This sequence includes an introduction to Christianity through the figure of Abraham and Jesus and then goes into details of Tunisian Christianity. In Tunisia, museums of history and archaeology attach particular importance to ancient Christianity and denigrate the medieval and contemporary Christianity as well as the

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<sup>904</sup>Marie Keyrouz is a Lebanese nun who is specialist in oriental sacred music

religious change within the Christian society. My concept considers both aspects and sheds light on socio-religious change in modern times.

### Unit 1: Introduction into Christianity

Christianity is a religion that draws on the life, teachings, and person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, announced by the prophets of the Old Testament, represents its central figure, and its historical foundation draws on believing in his resurrection.<sup>905</sup> Isaiah's prophetic text clearly mentioned the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ) would be more than just a man but God Himself.<sup>906</sup> The first Christian communities originated in the Middle East and cities of Jewish diaspora such as Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Ephesus. In the second century, Christianity grew rapidly, spread in Persia, India, and Ethiopia and became Rome's official religion at the end of the 4th century. The "*Council of Jerusalem*" has quickly confirmed the continuity of the new faith with the Torah.<sup>907</sup> For Christians, the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) constitutes with the New Testament the Christian Bible, which varies according to the confessions, in particular because of the Deuterocanonical Books. The New Testament canon is composed of 27 writings: the four canonical gospels that narrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles of many apostles to the first Christian communities, and the Apocalypse.<sup>908</sup> The New Testament stresses the paramount importance of Abraham as the recipient of the two divine promises and the forerunner of Jesus. As in Islam and Judaism, he represents the model of the true believer that responded promptly to God's call. According to the genealogy of Jesus, the New Testament interprets the divine promise of Abraham's offspring differently and attributes it to Christ and his Church.<sup>909</sup> The choice of Paul for Abraham instead of Moses was a trigger component of the rupture between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>910</sup> Moreover, Christians consider Jesus as God's son and word and the Messiah announced by Jewish prophets. He is the source of salvation for all men sent to spread peace and who performed more than thirty miracles.<sup>911</sup>

According to the letters of Paul of Tarsus, which are the oldest Christian texts, God sent the Messiah to redeem the sins of all men.<sup>912</sup> In the early days of Christianity, there was a divergence

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<sup>905</sup> Eliade, M. (2004) *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, t. 2, p. 316.

<sup>906</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>907</sup> Rouche, M. (2007). *Les origines du christianisme (30-451): N° 67*. Hachette Éducation.p. 16- 17.

<sup>908</sup> Eliade, M. (1994). *Dictionnaire des religions*, Pocket, coll. « Agora », p. 105.

<sup>909</sup> Matthew 1: 16.

<sup>910</sup> Quesnel, M. (2002) *Visages d'Abraham dans le Nouveau Testament*, Le Monde de la Bible, p. 35.

<sup>911</sup> Perrot, C., Souletie, J. L., & Thévenot, X. (1995). *Les miracles* (Vol. 14). Editions de l'Atelier, p. 108.

<sup>912</sup> Maccoby, H. (1990) *Paul et l'invention du christianisme*, Histoire, p. 266.

of opinions among Christian communities about believing in Jesus’s divinity. Ebionites believed in Jesus’ humanity and God’s transcendence, contrary to the Montanists and Marcionites, who rejected his humanity and believed in his divinity.<sup>913</sup> As showed in chapter 2, Muslims attach great importance to Jesus of Nazareth, consider him as God’s prophet, and call him “*Isaa*”.

In Tunisia, museums have not yet exhibited a Bible for the public, which places larger question marks about such negligence. For this reason, unit (1) will draw on a Bible in Arabic language and three terracotta tiles that deal with the sacrifice of Abraham and the miracle of Jesus. Glass panels will display verses of the Bible that deal with Abraham and Jesus. Many visitors complained of the absence of Arabic language in “*Shared Holy Places*”, which implies considering this observation and exhibit an Arabic Bible to help them overcome language barriers



Terracotta tile, Abraham holding Isaac, Tunisia, 6th-7th centuries, © www.zaherkammoun.com



A Bible in Arabic language, 1890, Egypt © collection of Sami Gergis



Terracotta tile of Christ’s miracle, Tunisia, 6th-7th centuries, © www.zaherkammoun.com



Terracotta tile of Christ’s features, Tunisia, 6th-7th centuries, © www.zaherkammoun.com

<sup>913</sup> Tardieu, M. (2004) *Marcion et la rupture radicale*, in *Les premiers temps de l’Église*, éd. Gallimard/Le Monde de la Bible, p. 401-407.

## Unit 2: Christians in Tunisia

The 4th and the beginning of the 5th century were the golden age of Christianity in Tunisia. However, the effervescence took an end with the interne division of the church and particularly with the Vandals' conquest. Byzantines' arrival in the sixth century gave a new Christian renaissance and succeeded to retain the old Roman bishoprics.<sup>914</sup> After the Arab conquest, several Christian Berbers showed an affinity for the new faith and converted to Islam, most likely to avoid paying the poll tax for non-Muslims called "*Djizya*". However, most of the Indigenous Christian communities "*Afâriqa*" remained in southern Tunisia, notably in Gabes and Gafsa and the oases of Djerid and Nafzawa and spoke a typically African Latin. In terms of Christian worship, these communities represented the most ancient Christianized groups in Ifrîqiya.<sup>915</sup> In mountainous regions in south Tunisia, Muslims converted ancient churches into mosques, such as that of Jebel Nafûsa, of which many apostolic mosques retain the name of "*kanîsa*" (church).<sup>916</sup> Under the Almohads, known for their religious fanaticism, Christianity has further declined after a forced conversion imposed by the authorities.<sup>917</sup> Under the Ottomans, the situation has changed and churches became more active and involved in terms of education and health, which encouraged European Christians to start new businesses in Tunisia.

After the French Protectorate of 1881, several French, Italian, and Maltese of Christian faith chose to settle in Tunisia. Their number surpassed the 250,000 in the mid-20th century, which represented 7% of the total population.<sup>918</sup> This effervescence implied the construction of further churches to provide spiritual support and prayer spaces to Christians who settled all over the country from north to south. Italians represented a large part of the Christians living in Tunisia and exceeded 100,000 persons in early 1900. In 1997, the number of Christians diminished and reached 93,000 persons (1% of the population) and continued to decline and reached 35,000 person in 2013.<sup>919</sup> Despite the large number of local conversions to Protestantism and Catholicism, the Christian community in Tunisia draws mainly on foreigners of almost 80 countries.<sup>920</sup> New converts belong to all sectors of Tunisian society, but given a rejection from

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<sup>914</sup> Troussel, P. (2003). *Les limites sud de la réoccupation byzantine*. *Antiquité tardive*, 10, p. 149-150.

<sup>915</sup> Marçais, G. (1941). *La Berbérie au IX e siècle d'après al-Ya 'qûbî*. *Revue africaine*, 85, p. 45-49.

<sup>916</sup> Allan, J. W. (1972). *Some mosques of the Jebel Nefusa*. *Libya Antiqua*. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Libya Tripoli*, 9, p. 168-169

<sup>917</sup> Molénat, J. P. (1997). *Sur le rôle des Almohades dans la fin du christianisme local au Maghreb et en al-Andalus*. *Al-Qantara*, 18 (2), p. 400.

<sup>918</sup> Seklani, M. (1974). *La population de la Tunisie*, Tunis, CICRED, p. 188-189.

<sup>919</sup> Pfannkuch, K. (2013, November) *Christians in Tunisia: Cause for Concern*, retrieved on 29.10.2019 from <https://en.qantara.de/content/christians-in-tunisia-cause-for-concern>.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid.

their families and relatives, they avoid appearing much in churches and prefer to meet in "house churches". They live predominantly in the metropolis of Tunis where there are many churches and encounter venues. During the observance, new converts use a Tunisian vernacular language, which calls into question the sacredness attributed to classical Arabic considered a language of Quran. For Tunisian Protestants, using Tunisian "derja" for praying, addressing God, and spreading their faith puts into question the nature of the relationship between the linguistic form and the religious background.<sup>921</sup> More significantly, they created a website called "El Massih Fi Tounes" (Jesus in Tunisia) that uses a vernacular language and tries to popularize Christianity through an easy and accessible language for all social classes and all ages.

This unit will draw on eight commemorative photographs, an illustration, and a postcard retracing the history of Christians from antiquity until today. An animated video of three minutes will provide visitors with an insight into the famous figures of African Christianity.



Illustration of martyr: the execution of Saint Cyprian in Carthage, Tunisia, 1930 © Hamdouni



Postcard of the Christian Basilica of Thuburbo Majus, Tunisia, 1955 © Hamdouni



Photograph of the annual Christian procession in memory of the martyrs Perputua and Felicita, Tunisia, 1901. © collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Priests at the International Eucharistic Congress, Carthage, 1930, © www. cienceandvideo.mmsfr

<sup>921</sup> Miller, C. & Haeri, N. (2008). *Langues, religion et modernité dans l'espace musulman*, REMMM 124, Aix-en-Provence, p. 300-337.



Christian dispensary, Tunis, 20th century © cultpatr.blogspot.com



Postcard of Notre Dame de Lourdes Church, Medenine, 1930, © collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Mass at the church of La Goulette, November 2017, © www.kapitalis.com/tunisie



Christmas at the cathedral of Tunis, December 2017, © Website of the cathedral of Tunis.



Protestant community, Reformed Church of Tunisia, December 2012, © www. ueem.umc-europe.org



Cultural and religious encounter in the Reformed Church of Tunisia. © www.temple.free.fr

### Unit 3: Christian Place of Worship

Church is the Christian religious building used for religious practices and meetings and its establishment responds to God's eternal purpose carried out in Christ. The "Church" is a translation of the Greek word "ekklesia", which means a called out body (assembly or circle)

of people who respond to God's call through Jesus Christ.<sup>922</sup> It means also a congregation or a specific location that hosts faithful religious practice.<sup>923</sup> In early Judaism, the word "*ekklesia*" referred also to Jewish temple (Assembly of god), which made from the words "*church*" and "*synagogue*" synonymous terms during the first and second century AD.<sup>924</sup> Given Jews' rejection of Christianity, the word "*ekklesia*" became more specific and designated predominantly the Christian assembly, whereas the term "*synagogue*" assigned the Jewish circle.<sup>925</sup> Christians built their churches according to a specific architectural layout that changed and morphed over the last centuries. Its plan is often in the form of a cross (Latin cross for Catholics and Greek cross for Orthodox), and its appellation varies according to its use and history (cathedral, abbey, chapel). It is always oriented from west to east, and the apse represents an essential marker of orthodox architecture. Numerous researchers claim that the oldest church in the world was the St. Thaddeus Church in Iran (66 AD) and the oldest church still in use today is the St. Etchmiadzin Cathedral in Armenia.<sup>926</sup> In North Africa, the Church spread with the Romans during the third and fourth centuries, and it is still possible to see their ruins on the site of Carthage.

June 27, 1964, was a turning point in the history of Tunisian churches after the conclusion of a *modus vivendi* between the Holy See and Tunisian government to cede a large part of the property of the Catholic Church (107 churches) to the state.<sup>927</sup> The thrust of this conclusion was the removal of all visible dimensions of Christian properties by peeling the crosses and inscriptions from the churches, as it was the case of "*Bab Bhar*" in the medina of Tunis. The abandonment of these churches and State financial incapacity of restoration and rehabilitation accelerated the gradual disappearance of the Christian material heritage. Some churches have been converted into libraries (St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Sfax), into cultural cafes (Ghar Melah Church), archaeological museums (Enfida Church) or even into boxing gyms (Saint-Thérèse-de-l'Enfant-Jésus Church). These facts attest a trend of a new secularization, a setback and weakening that affected religion in general and Christianity in particular in Tunisia. The only churches that escaped that fate were those that belonged to the archdiocese of Tunis: Cathedral of Tunis, Church Jeanne-d'Arc (Goulette), Church-chapel of Lavigerie (Marsa), the

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<sup>922</sup> Matthew 16:18.

<sup>923</sup> Matthew 18:17.

<sup>924</sup> Marguerat, D. (2010) *Jésus de Nazareth ou Paul de Tarse*, in Marguerat, D. & Junod, É., *Qui a fondé le christianisme*, éd. Bayard, p. 12- 13.

<sup>925</sup> Léon-Dufour, X. (1981) *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Paris, Cerf, « Église » p. 323.

<sup>926</sup> Horne, C. F. (1925) *The World and Its People: A Comprehensive Tour of All Lands*, New York, p. 1312.

<sup>927</sup> Mokelwa, J. P. B. (2010). *Les traités internationaux du Saint-Siège avec les États en Afrique, 1885-2005*. Editions L'Harmattan, p. 78-79.

churches of Hammamet, Sousse, and Djerba, each with its presbytery. This ecclesiastical constituency (archdiocese of Tunis) manages the Catholic places of worship, schools, and libraries, and consists of 20 congregations, 131 nuns and 46 priests who organize Masses in Arabic, French, Spanish, English, and Italian. Tunis and its suburbs represent the most active areas for Christians due to its four Catholic churches, two Protestant churches (Reformed and Anglican) that host evangelicals, Greek Orthodox Church, and Russian Orthodox Church.

With the arrival of African Christians in 2005, a ritual vagueness and discomfort emerged in these churches because of the denominations and religious culture differences between the Pentecostals, Methodists, Mennonites, and Baptists.<sup>928</sup> Their preferences in terms of prayer ranging from silent and traditional meditation to more expressive aloud prayer created a number of disturbances and difficulties. Their discrepancy in terms of using music and charismatic practices during their worship have led the Pentecostal to separate and to create their own Church in la Marsa.

This unit will draw on ten pictures of churches still used for worship, transformed in public space or crumbled because of the lack of conservation.<sup>929</sup> It is important to stress that the majority of the churches built in Tunisia are not in use for lack of conservation. A national map with the locations of all the churches built in Tunisia will be printed and exhibited on the unit's wall. A three-minute video filmed inside the cathedral of Tunis will allow visitors to discover the church's interior and architecture and allow a section of population that do not dare to enter a church for religious fear to be acquainted with their national heritage.



Cathedral Saint-Vincent-de-Paul of Tunis, built in 1897 and still in use.



Church of St. Augustine and St. Fidela of La Goulette, built in 1872 and still in use.

<sup>928</sup> Boissevain 2014, p 116-118.

<sup>929</sup> All unit's photographs are retrieved on 04.11.2019 from <https://tunisie-genealogie.com/eglises-catholiques-tunisie.html>.

#### IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia



Church Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc of Tunis, built in 1911 (active place of worship)



Church of St. Joseph of Djerba, built in 1848 (active place of worship)



Church of St. Felix de Sousse, built in 1916 (active place of worship)



St. Augustine Church of Enfida, built in 1907 and transformed into a museum.



Sainte-Thérèse-de-l'Enfant-Jésus Church built in 1936 and transformed into a cultural centre.



Church of Our Lady of the Rosary of Béja, built in 1938 and transformed into a cultural complex



S. Félicité Church and S. Perpétue de Tebourba, built in 1948 and transformed into a library.



The ruined Church of Oued Zarga Church, built in 1928.

#### Unit 4: The Church: A Place for Interreligious Hospitality, Sharing, and Tolerance

A large part of Tunisians have not set foot in a church and do not know what it looks like due to a popular misconception claiming that it is prohibited to enter worship places other than mosques out of curiosity or interest for fear of being influenced and losing faith in Allah or for doing a forbidden act *haram*. This standpoint contradicts the hadith of the prophet that considers every space on earth as a place of prostration for God, which even permits Muslims to pray in churches or synagogues.<sup>930</sup> The core of this fear is that churches are associated with the proselytism and evangelistic efforts of Christian preachers faulted for generating a huge wave of conversion to Christianity. Moreover, Churches and synagogues represent for many Tunisians a symbol of colonialism and war and remind them of many wounds, enslavement, and dishonour, which triggered a blind rejection and even a refusal to build new ones. This rejection did not exist under prime Islamic dynasties, and the proof is that Romdhane Bey ordered in 1696 the construction of The St. George Anglican Church in Tunis and buried there his mother Mary, who was a Protestant Italian.<sup>931</sup> The construction of a church by a Muslim prince in a Muslim country indicates that religious coexistence, acceptance, and tolerance reigned in society and families and testifies a religious recognition from a Muslim prince to his mother.

In Islamic jurisprudence, many “*Ulema*”, such as Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, current president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, claims that Islam does not oppose the building of new churches in Islamic land.<sup>932</sup> This is evidenced by the fact that many churches have been constructed in countries strongly impregnated with Islam during the last two decades. Qatar built its first Christian church “*The Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire Church*” and United Arab Emirates built two magnificent churches called “*St. Philip the Apostle Russian Orthodox Church*” and “*St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Jebel Ali*”, which is a sign of tolerance, openness, and diversity that should spread in Muslim countries.<sup>933</sup> Religious hospitality and coexistence is a central theme in Abrahamic religions. The nostalgia of religious coexistence between Jews, Christians, and Muslims has deteriorated during the last decades in Tunisia, in

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<sup>930</sup> According to the hadith of the prophet, all sacred places are suitable to pray and Islam does not prohibit entering them. “*The earth has been made for me a place of prostration and a means of purification, so wherever a man of my Ummah is when the time for prayer comes, let him pray.*” Vol. 1, Book 8, Hadith 737.

<sup>931</sup> Abdelwaheb, H. H. (2015) *Résumé de l'histoire de Tunisie*, vol. 5, Tunis, p. 122-124.

<sup>932</sup> L'Islam n'interdit pas la construction des églises (07.08.2015), retrieved on 19.07.2021 from <https://www.azhar.eg/observer-fr/details/ArtMID/1154/ArticleID/2154/L'Islam-ninterdit-pas-la-construction-des-233glises>

<sup>933</sup> Une première église consacrée au Qatar (17.03.2008) retrieved on 19.07.2021 from [https://www.la-croix.com/Semaine-en-images/Une-premiere-eglise-consacree-au-Qatar-\\_NG\\_-2008-03-17-669416](https://www.la-croix.com/Semaine-en-images/Une-premiere-eglise-consacree-au-Qatar-_NG_-2008-03-17-669416)

particular after the revolution since Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and even Islamic heritage (mausoleums) were a target of vandalism and looting. Showing visitors that there is no religious transgression in visiting Churches and Synagogues and no sin in discovering different religious tradition or custom would help counter many stereotypes and overcome the identitarian closure against other faiths.

Visitors should be aware that there is a spontaneous and curious attendance of Muslims in Tunisian churches and synagogues out of curiosity. Performing prayers that cross the religious boundaries by making pious wishes to the same god is not a new phenomenon in Tunisia, since it goes back to the 19th century in Tunis and in the south-eastern part of the country. Many Muslim women enter discretely the cathedral of Tunis and light up candles with the aim of seeking for "*baraka*" (grace) and vow fulfilment. In Djerba, this coexistence and recognition morphed into a sharing of religious fests, food, and rituals such as the lighting of candles in the Shabbat.<sup>934</sup> This religious interbreeding is not a religious infringement since the faithful do not intend to convert but seek religious piety, which shows that the religious systems are not natural antagonistic entities and calls into question the absolutist vision of religious identities.

This unit draws mainly on 10 photographs printed with their explanatory texts on the unit's wall to emphasize the interreligious hospitality with churches. A candleholder and a set of candles made of beeswax exhibited in showcases will stress the importance of the light in the Abrahamic religions as a request for God's presence and forgiveness.



Candles made of beeswax for church, Tunisia, 21st century, © collection of Guiseppe Peluso



Muslims praying in Jewish pilgrimage "La Ghriba", Tunisia © [www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail](http://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail)

<sup>934</sup> Albera, D., & Pénicaut, M. (2016). *La synagogue de la Ghriba à Djerba. Réflexions sur l'inclusivité d'un sanctuaire partagé en Tunisie*. Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer. Revue de géographie de Bordeaux, 69 (274), p.103-132.



A Tunisian Muslim praying in the synagogue of Jerba. © Shared Holy Places, M. Penicaud



A common Jewish, Christian, and Muslim celebration in the synagogue of Djerba, 2019, © [www.tunisie.co/ar/article/11843](http://www.tunisie.co/ar/article/11843)



St. George Anglican Church (Tunis), dedicated from a Muslim bey to his Christian mother, © [www.webdo.tn](http://www.webdo.tn)



Muslims attending Sunday mass Reformed Church, Marseille, 2016, © [www.laprovence.com/article/edition-marseille](http://www.laprovence.com/article/edition-marseille)



Muslims praying with Christians and eating their bread in Sunday Mass, Italy, 2016, © [www.correspondanceeuropeenne.eu](http://www.correspondanceeuropeenne.eu)



Gisors church hosted Muslim prayers for one month until the reparation of their mosque, France, 2018, © [www.bladi.net/musulmans-priere-eglise-france](http://www.bladi.net/musulmans-priere-eglise-france)



The St. George Jacobite Orthodox Church hosting Muslims to pray during Ramadan, U.A.E. 2016, © www.oumma.com/emirats-arabes-unis-chretiens



A Muslim praying in the Cave of the Patriarchs, Hebron. Shared Holy Places. © M. Penicaud

### Unit 5: Christian Religious Symbols and Significance

The religious symbols are elements charged with meanings that go beyond the material appearance of objects or signs and create a transition from the visible to the invisible.<sup>935</sup> In Christianity, the language of symbols is quite prominent in the Bible, churches, and ornamentation. Christian religious buildings bear religious meaning in their plan, delineation, construction, and embellishment, which creates a spiritual correspondence that appeals to the faithful's intellect and emotions. These symbols are of geometric orders such as the primitive circle that symbolizes the totality (character of God), the square that represents the four cardinal virtues, the triangle that represents the Christian trinity, and the octagon that symbolizes the resurrection.<sup>936</sup> This fact explains the octagonal form of many baptisteries all over the worlds. The Bible confers a symbolic significance to numbers but does not accord any one of them a sacred character. The number three (3) recalls the Trinity, five (5) stand for the five sacred books, seven (7) symbolizes the seven-day cycle of the creation of the world, and twelve (12) represents the apostles of Jesus.<sup>937</sup> The combining of symbolic numbers with geometric form leads to a sacred geometry as is the case of the nave with its seven spans and its twelve columns visible in many churches. Other symbols appeared with the religious persecutions and repression as a recognition mark for Christians.

The cross, which is today the main symbol of Christianity that commemorates Christ's sacrifice, was used during the first centuries for teasing and taunting the Christians. From the 4th century

<sup>935</sup> Gambier, G. (2012) *symbolisme dans l'art roman*, La Taillanderie, p. 9

<sup>936</sup> Schwarz, F. (2003). *Symbolique des cathédrales*, éditions du Huitième jour, Paris, p. 28-29.

<sup>937</sup> Ibid. p. 60-61.

onward, it became a principal emblem of Christianity and acquired many spiritual, symbolic, and protective virtues. After the recognition of Christianity by Constantine, the cross and the chrismon spread quickly, adorned clothes, lamps, coins, sarcophagi, churches, houses, jewels, and tattoos, and church's architecture increasingly evolved into its form.<sup>938</sup> The cross has several forms that vary between Greek, Latin, and crutch, whereas the chrismon has usually the same form. The chrismon or the monogram of Christ is a major symbol of Christianity, it is composed of the first two capital letters of the word Christ in Greek X (chi) and P (rho) superimposed on each other and symbolizes God in his totality, divinity, and eternity.<sup>939</sup> The crucifix predominantly marks Catholic and Orthodox churches, houses, and cemeteries, and it is reminiscent of Jesus's crucifixion, sacrifice, and death on the cross. For Protestant churches, the statuette of Jesus attached to a cross (crucifix) is not so much appreciated since it represents a form of idolatry, in contrast to Anglican churches that took a middle position on this subject.<sup>940</sup>

Apart from the geometric symbol, fauna and flora shapes are important emblems of Christian religious symbols. There is reference to nature in many religious texts such as Psalms,<sup>941</sup> and different images of animals such as sparrows, doves, and ewes in Jesus's discourses.<sup>942</sup> The dove, a symbol of the Ark and Holy Spirit, and the fish Ichthus, symbol of Jesus Christ, were a distinction element and recognition code for repressed Christians during the Roman era. The dove as sign of peace and purity became a symbol of the Holy Spirit,<sup>943</sup> and the fish became a symbol of abundant life, baptism, and resurrection, designated as the image of "*Jesus Christ son of God and the savior / Iesus Kristus Theou Yios Soster*".<sup>944</sup> The mystical lamb has also an important place in Christian religious symbols for being a sacrificial animal endowed with messianic significance that symbolizes Jesus's sacrifice for the liberation and the salvation of man. In the popular imagination, other animals have also acquired a symbolic and religious significance such as the Peacock (eternal life), lion (power), eagle (ascension), bull (fertility), and the cop and deer (resurrection).<sup>945</sup> Most of these symbols are very prominent in ecclesiastical art such as iconography, woodcarving, ornaments, and sacred properties. The symbolic animals were often associated with the four evangelists: the angel for Matthew, the

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<sup>938</sup> Boepflug, F. (2011). *Dieu et ses images: Une histoire de l'Éternel dans l'art*, éd. Bayard, p.75-76

<sup>939</sup> When the chrismon contains the letters α (Alpha) and ω (Omega), it symbolizes the beginning and the end.

<sup>940</sup> Hoppenot, J. (1901) *Le crucifix dans l'histoire, dans l'art, dans l'âme des saints et dans notre vie*, éd. Desclée de Brouwer, p. 386-388.

<sup>941</sup> Psalm 90, 96, 102. Bible Gateway

<sup>942</sup> Matthew 10: 16, 29.

<sup>943</sup> Luke 3:22.

<sup>944</sup> Tillie, M. (2014, March) *Faites parler les pierres: le langage symboliques et les églises*, commission d'art sacré diocèse d'Arras, p. 10.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid. p 11-12.

bull for Luke, the eagle for John, and the lion for Mark. It is important to stress that they were often represented with wings, which remind of the Apocalypse.

This unit will draw on a monogram of Christ engraved in relief, two cross pendants, an Orthodox amulet With the Cross and Myrrh, a copy of a mosaic with prophylactic fishes, earrings in the form of the Ichthys, a church hand bell with a Peacock engraving, and a photograph of the geometry of Tunis cathedral's nave.



The monogram of Christ engraved in relief, IMP, Tunis, National Institute of Tunisian Heritage.



Silver Christogram Pendant (Chi Rho) 21st century, © Collection of Februnia Aras



Silver cross pendant with fish symbol (Ichthys), 21st century, © Collection of Februnia Aras



Orthodox amulet with the cross and myrrh, 21st century, © Collection of Februnia Aras



Two fish on a Christian mosaic, Tunisia. 4th century, Bardo Museum © Aymen Hamdouni



Silver fish earrings (Ichthys), 21st century © Collection of Februnia Aras



Hand bell with a Peacock, France, 21 century. ©  
Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Architectural Symbolic language of the cathedral of  
Tunis, 2017 © www.archeologiechretienne.ive

### Unit 6: Christian Ritualistic and Devotional Objects

Objects of worship are indispensable components in the Christian liturgy, and their association with religious clothing and gestures provides meaning and significance and establishes communication between the sacred (transcendent) and the profane (realm of time). It is important to make a distinction between the so-called "*blessed*" or "*consecrated*" objects that Christians devoted to God as part of a ritual practice and the so-called "*holy*" objects that endow a sacred character and power from God, Christ, and relics.<sup>946</sup> Similarly, a further distinction has to be made between objects seen to be magic and hold a protective power such as amulets and sacred objects "*philacteria*" such as chrism, cross, oil, and chalice. Several objects have particular importance such as the paten and chalice, which is a sacred vessel that recalls the wine cup of the "*Last Supper*" and is used to celebrate the consecration of wine and commemorate the blood of Christ. The ciborium is also an object of paramount importance in several Christian liturgies, in particular during the Eucharistic. This sacred vessel, closed with a lid and surmounted by a cross, contains the consecrated hosts that faithful receive during the communion. The stoop and sprinkler used to spray holy water during the blessings and consecration ceremonies and vessels for holy oils (oil of sick, catechumens, and chrism) are of very particular spiritual significance in Christian liturgy because they involve faithful in the royal, priestly, and prophetic unction of Christ.

During Catholic Masses, processional cross and candlesticks acquire a particular importance since they provide signs of the presence of Christ who guides and opens paths to the faithful through his light. The same goes for the monstrance, which is often made of a sun-shaped gilded

<sup>946</sup> Vincent, C. (2007) *Les luminaires en usage dans le culte chrétien occidental au Moyen Âge ont-ils eu le statut d'« objet sacré » ?* in *Objets sacrés, objets magiques de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge*, p. 182.

metal used to revere Christ's presence during the Eucharist. The incense-boat that contains the grains of incense and the thurible that contains hot coals and releases smoke are two primordial objects to incense the cross, altar, and celebrant and recalls the prayer that goes up toward God. It is also important to point out that some objects such as the bell that indicates the moment of consecration have lost over time their functions and value in new churches because of the easiness of seeing all the priest gestures without the need for a warning sound. However, other objects such as relics that belonged to holy persons or having been in contact with them have become more significant and celebrated within churches to commemorate the sacrifice of the saints as well of that of Jesus. Physical remains of saints or venerated persons are preserved for purposes of veneration and as a tangible memorial. They are usually deposited under the altars, in cavities called "*sepulchres*", or kept in boxes called reliquaries and are disclosed to the faithful during the processions.

This unit will draw on the main ritualistic and devotional objects in the Roman-Catholic liturgy such as Protective blades of chalice, water bucket and sprinkler, candlesticks, pastoral stole, processional cross, rosary, and a censer. A large part of Tunisians have no clear idea about Christian prayer and mass ceremony. For this reason, unit (6) will include a short video to give visitors an overview on the Christian prayer and the different stages of the mass.



Protective blades for chalice, France, 21st century. © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Bronze holy water bucket and sprinkler, France, 21st century. © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Processional cross and candlesticks, France, 21<sup>st</sup> century © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Candlesticks, France, 21st century, © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Purple pastoral stole with embroidered gold cross, France, 21<sup>st</sup>, century © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Monstrance, France, first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Silver Metal Censer, Tunisia, 21<sup>st</sup> century. © Collection of Februnia Aras



The Bible and a rosary in silver, Tunisia, 21<sup>st</sup> century, © Collection of Februnia Aras

### Unit 7: The Heirs of Abraham, Jesus (Immersive Room)

According to a study at Cambridge University that used computer-based methods to measure persons' historical significance through literary and media sources analysis, Jesus represents the most important figure in human history and most significant one in religious figures.<sup>947</sup> Jesus is mooted as man and God and as Messiah and Lord who nourishes faithful spirituality and strongly marks the Christian history. The chronological reading of history reveals interesting details about Jesus's human, religious, and social dimension. Nonetheless, it requires a theological reading of the Bible to have a clear picture of his resurrection, humanity, divinity, and redemption. Various authors claim that it is difficult to dissociate these two complementary interpretations because Jesus is the same person in both faith and history, with a wide-ranging spiritual significance in the religious text.<sup>948</sup> In Christianity, Jesus is the Son of the Virgin Mary, and the Messiah who travels through Galilee and Judea to heal, bring comfort, hope, and spread

<sup>947</sup> Zbinden, R. (2017, January) *Jésus est la figure la plus importante de l'histoire humaine*, retrieved on 10.12.2019 from <https://www.cath.ch/newsf/jesus-figure-plus-importante-de-lhistoire-humaine/>

<sup>948</sup> Bezançon, J. N. (1988). *Jésus le Christ*. Desclée de Brouwer, p. 9-17.

his faith, and whose sacrificial death should redeem the sins of humankind.<sup>949</sup> In Judaism, the nation of the Messiah differs from that anchored in the Christian belief that attaches particular importance to the Resurrection. In Islam, the figure of “*Îsâ*” (Jesus) is a “*divine creation*”,<sup>950</sup> which tends to have an eschatological dimension that links his return to earth with the end of the world and the Last Judgment.<sup>951</sup>

The artistic representation of Jesus became over time the main figure of Christian art in Western and Eastern Europe and took different forms of expression. The evangelists have chosen a non-physical presentation (chrism, ichtus, lamb), and gave more importance to Jesus’s words than to his appearance.<sup>952</sup> The iconography of Jesus evolved and gave him a Hellenistic appearance close to pagan deities as a beardless orator with short and curly hair, dressed in a tunic with an arm wrapped in the cloak and an arm resting on his hip.<sup>953</sup> In the East, this Hellenistic influence figure subsisted with a different, Semitic figure (bearded and with long hair) until the eleventh century, and ended up with a definitive physiognomy endowed with a Mediterranean face and long black hair falling on the shoulders. Through painting, interactive display tools such as video projection equipment, Short films (biographical), 3D video mapping, and touch panels, the immersive room will provide visitors with an overview into the episodes of Jesus Christ’s life from his childhood, arrival in Jerusalem, crucifixion, resurrection, and rise to Heaven. Touch panels will allow visitors to scroll photographs of artistic masterpieces that deal with Jesus such as:

- Nativity, by Giotto di Bondone (1305)
- The Entry into Jerusalem, by Giotto (1305-1306)
- The Adoration of the Magi, by Leonardo da Vinci (1481-1482)
- The Transfiguration, by Raphaël (1520)

### 2.1.3. Sequence 3: Islam

The sequence of Islam splits into two distinct parts: a main showroom composed of six units and a projection room that aims to provide visitors with an immersive experience (mapping,

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<sup>949</sup> Eliade 2004, p. 331-332.

<sup>950</sup> Qur'an Surah Ali 'Imran 3:47.

<sup>951</sup> Urvoy, M. T. (2007). *Jésus*, in M. A. Amir-Moezzi (dir.) Dictionnaire du Coran, éd. Robert Laffont, p. 438, 439.

<sup>952</sup> Boespflug, F. (2008). *Premiers visages de Jésus*, in *Jésus*, Le Point Hors-série no 1, p. 93–96.

<sup>953</sup> Burnet, E., & Burnet, R. (2006). *Pour décoder un tableau religieux: Nouveau Testament*. Les Editions Fides, p.127-128.

short films, and testimonies). Each unit addresses a specific topic using different display tools such as religious objects, postcards, photographs, and engravings. A large part of the selected objects belongs to my family's private collection and that of Mhamoud naffati. Sunni Islam has a complex relationship with music, and many imams claim that music should include religious or mystical words to acquire a religious legitimacy.<sup>954</sup> The soundscape of the sequence will be an instrumental track and vocal recording of devotional poems of Islam "*nasheed*". Two units will include explanatory documentaries to reveal the intangible side of religious objects, worships, testimonies, and achieve interactivity and critical distance. This sequence includes an introduction to Islam through the figure of Abraham and Muhammad and go then into details of Tunisian Islam. Tunisian history museums attach particular importance to Islamic archaeology and fail to inform visitors about the religious traditions that survived and customs that disappeared. In turn, my concepts focus on displaying artifacts that refer to the immaterial dimension of beliefs and traditions, in particular those that are fading because of the demographic growth, secularist trend, and new lifestyle modes of postmodern societies.

#### Unit 1: Introduction into Islam

Islam is an Abrahamic religion that draws on a pure monotheism called "*Tawhid*" and takes its legitimation from the Koran that God revealed to Muhammad in the 7th century.<sup>955</sup> Its sources are the Koran, Hadith (the narrative of the prophet's words and actions), sharia (relative precepts to the religious, moral, and legal conduct of individuals), and Fiqh which is the legal precepts relating to the social, economic, and political relations between individuals. One of the most distinctive features of the Islam is the "*ijtihad*", which is an intellectual effort to correct and interpret the sharia guidelines. The main theological currents of Islam are the Sunnism that gathers around 90% of Muslims, the Shiism 10%, and the Ibadism as a branch of Kharijism 1%.<sup>956</sup> The weakening of Muslim power and absence of clergy is one of the reasons that has given birth to Sufi philosophical schools and mystical movement that sought closer communion with God. Similarly, four schools of jurisprudence emerged from Sunnism, each of which took the name of the imam who created it (Hanifa, Malik, Chafi'i, and Hanbal). These schools accept each other, organize themselves in a legal pluralism, and share with slight difference the same beliefs. Islam and Christianity are religions written and memorized in sacred books and destined for Adam's descendants, which opens many conflicts of interpretation. Muslims claim that due

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<sup>954</sup> Dufourcq, N. (Ed.). (1957). *Larousse de la musique*. Larousse. Paris, p. 791

<sup>955</sup> Chebel, M. (1995). *Dictionnaire des symboles musulman*, éd. Albin Michel p. 274-275.

<sup>956</sup> Brovelli, I. (2006). *Laïcité: réflexions autour d'un mal français: les limites d'une société sans Dieu*. Editions de France, p. 145.

to the distortion of other religious texts, God's word in its final version is genuinely in the Quran. As opposed to this, there are critical studies that consider Islam as a form of heretical derivation and more precisely a Christian heresy very close to Arianism due its duality (proximity/difference) with Christianity.<sup>957</sup> It is important to stress that Islam as a "*religion revived by a prophetic revelation*"<sup>958</sup> is certainly different from Judaism and Christianity but it still contains in its texts various similarities that connect it with other faiths. It calls Muslims to believe in other prophets and final judgment, and recognizes the divine origin of Jewish and Christian sacred books even if it puts in doubt their authenticity.<sup>959</sup>

Islam shows many differences, if not fractures, with Judaism and Christianity, however it shares with them common characters such as Noah, Moses, Jesus, and Abraham and notions like prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and trusting God. Islam gives a particular importance to Abraham and considers him as a universal faithful and God's friend "*Khalil*". The Quran quotes Abraham 69 times and hundreds of verses and hadith hint of him as a model of righteousness and of submission to God's will.<sup>960</sup> Two central elements added value to Abraham in the Islamic tradition, and are his response to God's order of building a place of worship, which is the Ka'ba in Mecca, and his act of faith and obedience to sacrifice his son.<sup>961</sup> In contrast to the Jewish tradition that places the sacrifice scene on mount Moriah in Jerusalem, Islam pinpoints it in Mecca and does not sufficiently identify which son of Abraham he was about to sacrifice.

Unit 1 will draw on a manuscript, miniature Kaaba wall hanging décor, and a book painting with a hidden face of the prophet to avoid offending Muslims' religious sensibility and fear of falling in the idolatry. The Quran does not formally prohibit pictures of the prophet, contrary to some of the hadiths dating from the ninth century that prohibit humans' representations.

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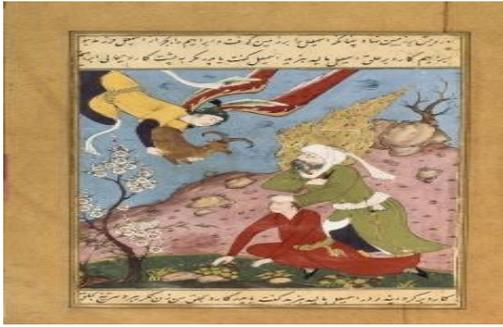
<sup>957</sup> Damascène, J. (1992) *Écrits sur l'Islam, Présentation, commentaires et traduction par Raymond Le Coz*, Paris, Cerf, p.210-213.

<sup>958</sup> Borrmans, M. (2009). *Prophètes du dialogue islamo-chrétien: Louis Massignon, Jean Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, Louis Gardet, Georges C. Anawati*. Éd. du Cerf, p 32.

<sup>959</sup> Hamoneau, D. (2006). *La torah, l'évangile et le coran : étude critique*, Créadif et Andalouss, p. 222-223.

<sup>960</sup> Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah 2: 135.

<sup>961</sup> Qur'an, Surah As-Saffat 37:101.

 <p>Manuscript, sacrifice of Abraham, 1595, Qazvin, Iran, © www.qantaramed.org/public</p>	 <p>Persian miniature, sacrifice of Abraham, Louqman, 1583, © www.qantaramed.org/public</p>
 <p>Newly born Muhammad with hidden face, Turkish book painting, © www.bibliotecapleyades.net.</p>	 <p>Kaaba, wall hanging decor, Tunisia, 2019, © Hamdouni</p>

### Unit 2: Muslims in Tunisia

Islam represents the official religion in Tunisia and consists of a Sunni majority of Maliki rite and an Ibadite minority located in the south of the country, particularly in Djerba. Maliki rite of Sunni Islam strengthened due the effervescence of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, which by the 9th century shined forth in the Islamic world as an important centre for teaching Malikite jurisprudence. This school of thought differs essentially from other schools due to its more hierarchical structure headed by a primate and its consideration to the first Muslim inhabitants of Medina's practices as complementary sources of jurisprudence. It draws its inspiration from the Founder's thought of the imam Mâlik Ibn Anas based on a permanent exegesis that uses a dialectic of philosophy. He prefers to legislate on a case-by-case basis to find a solution to unclearly expressed situations, contrary to the Hanbalite School that prefers using a textual rigor.<sup>962</sup> It is worth noting that the collapse of the Rustamids in 909, has favoured the expansion of a new branch of Islam in the region of Djerid called "*Ibadism*". Until the 12th centuries,

<sup>962</sup> Kamali, M. H. (2008). *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, Oneworld, Oxford, p. 1-352.

Djerid was one of the most dynamic regions that contributed to Ibadism's social and religious turmoil before ceding its place to Djerba, which until the present time retains a large Ibadite community. This community has actively marked the Maghreb history in medieval times and became a strategic trading post and religious force that resisted the Ottoman authority, remained Ibadite, and morphed into a melting point to train scholars from the whole Maghreb.<sup>963</sup> The religious resistance of the Ibadites jammed the entrance of other schools of thought and lagged the establishment of Malikite madrasa until 1674.<sup>964</sup> This religious stiffness is deeply rooted in the Tunisian collective imagination that links the Ibadites with revolt and polemics inherited from the "*Kharijites*".<sup>965</sup> In return, the Ibadites define themselves as "*democrats of Islam*" who contributed in the propagation of Islam among Berber tribes and as a peaceful community that lived in harmony with Jews and Christians for centuries.<sup>966</sup>

One of the most distinctive features of Islam in Tunisia is a popular belief that gives marabout a supernatural power. Although mysticism does not have its source in Koran, it became in Tunisia a common way of holiness and reconciliation with God. This form of asceticism has its origins in the pre-Islamic traditions and animist beliefs, except that in contact with Islam, it morphed into a veneration of the saints called "*awliyâ*". In the Middle Ages, "*Maraboutism*" developed very quickly in the eighth century due to the construction of fortified convents called "*ribats*", such as those of Monastir, Sousse, and Lamta, which hosted religious confraternities and helped pious people get spiritual merits.<sup>967</sup> In modern and contemporary Tunisia, mystical activities have grown inside the shrines "*zawyas*" all over the country and consequently a differentiation emerged between female and male mystical circles. The grouping of saints' followers called "*zyarat*" takes place every Saturday, begins at dawn, and ends around noon. These religious gatherings acquire a particular importance during the period of summer recess "*ezzmi*" and last three days instead of one morning. They begin with a session of religious chants called "*ahzâb*", which is accessible to everyone and followed by session of a "*dikr*" (remembrance of Allah) reserved for initiates. The ceremony ends up with an individual and collective prayer of invocation called "*dua*" that seeks spiritual merits.<sup>968</sup>

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<sup>963</sup> Prevost, V. (2008). *L'aventure ibādite dans le Sud tunisien (VIIIe-XIIIe siècle): Effervescence d'une région méconnue*. Suomalaisen tiedeakatemian toimituksia. Sarja Humaniora, p. 315-319.

<sup>964</sup> Brunshvig, R. (1931). *Quelques remarques historiques sur les medersas de Tunis*. Revue Tunisienne, p.283.

<sup>965</sup> Prevost, V., & Derriks, A. (2011). *Les ibadites en leurs mosquées cachées*. Qantara: magazine des cultures arabe et méditerranéenne, (82), p. 60-63.

<sup>966</sup> Koribaa, N. (1991). *Les Kharidjites: démocrates de l'Islam*. Ed. Publisud, p. 1-7.

<sup>967</sup> Jalloul, N. (1999). *Les ribats maritimes, en Ifriqiya au moyen âge*, Tunis, p. 11-12.

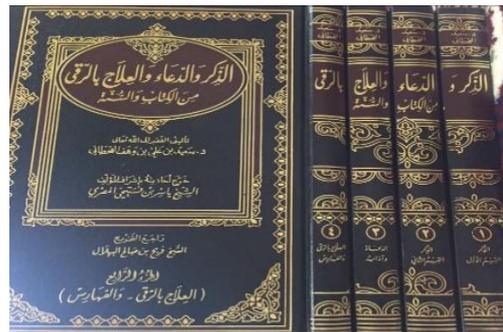
<sup>968</sup> Ferchiou, S. (1972). *Survivances mystiques et culte de possession dans le maraboutisme tunisien*. L'Homme, p. 50.

## IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia

Unit 2 will draw on an Islamic rosary, a set of books for religious Dhikr, and a candlestick displayed in showcases. It is important to stress that Muslims do not deem these items as sacred objects, despite their use before and after their prayers. Three postcards and two photographs will provide visitors with an overview about the life of marabouts, the Ibadi mosque and architecture, and Muslim female religious costume that varies according to the Islamic current. Unit 2 will include a documentary film to introduce the most famous saint marabout and their shrines in Tunisia.



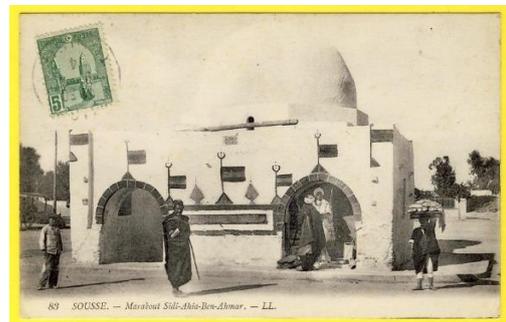
Islamic rosary (sebha) used for the remembrance of Allah, 21st century, © Hamdouni



Set of books of religious Dhikr, Tunisia, 21st century, © Hamdouni



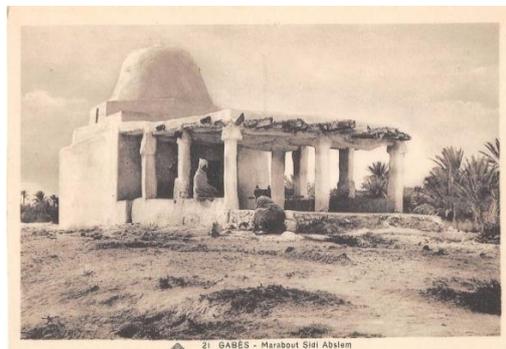
Islamic candlestick with Arabic calligraphy, 21st century, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



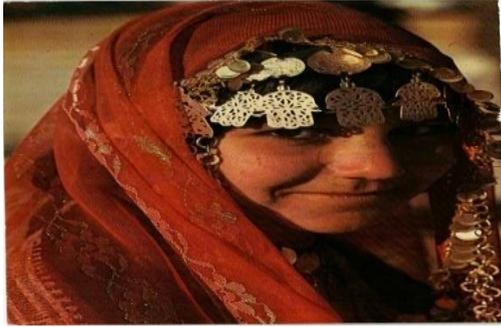
Tomb of the marabout Ben Ahmer, Sousse, Tunisia, 20th century, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



"Busitta" underground Ibadi mosque, Djerba, © [www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie)



Postcard, tomb of the marabout Sidi Abdessalem, Tunisia, 20th century, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



unni woman in costume with prophylactic jewellery  
21st century © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



A photograph of an Ibadi woman wearing a safsari,  
Djerba, 2015. © www.lemonde.fr/afrique

### Unit 3: Islamic Place of Worship

Mosques are the central prostration places in Islam given their function of gathering faithful to celebrate the religious service, daily prayers, and weekly prayers (Friday ceremony), which makes them the most sacred and privileged spaces of religious observance, education, and socialization.<sup>969</sup> The first mosques were square places with covered column-lined galleries very similar to a prophet house's courtyard, which is at the origin of their architecture. The first mosque built during the prophet migration from Mecca to Medina was “*el Quba*” mosque in Medina, and quickly other mosques merged in the conquered regions. The prayer hall, “*sahn*” (courtyard), used also as a prayer space during summertime, and galleries were the first elements of the mosque. Over time, other components have been added to the mosque, such as the “*maqsurah*”, which is a special enclosure framed with wooden panels to protect the sovereign from attacks, ablution room for the religious act of purification, and the minaret for prayer call and city monitoring. Tunisia has more than 5000 mosques, of which the overwhelming majority are of Maliki rite and a few of Hanafi and Ibadite rites, which are in certain cases underground. The architecture of Tunisian mosques varies according to the governor's rite, period of construction, available materials, architect, and region. These differences are visible in the form of minaret, minbar, and mihrab, as well as the exterior and interior decoration.

The Great Mosque of Kairouan represents the oldest mosque (670 AD) and first Muslim metropolis in the Maghreb.<sup>970</sup> Many scholars consider it Tunisia's spiritual and religious centre

<sup>969</sup> Sourdél, J., & Sourdél, D. (1996). *Dictionnaire historique de l'Islam*. Presses Univ. de France, p. 800-1110.

<sup>970</sup> Garcin, J. C., Arnaud, J. L., & Denoix, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval*. École française de Rom, p. 81.

and the fourth holy city of Sunni Islam.<sup>971</sup> The “*Zitouna*” mosque that dates back to the 8th century represents the second oldest mosque in Ifriqiya and second largest in Tunisia with 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>. It has a profound symbolic importance for Christians given its emplacement above a Christian Basilica and the tomb of Santa Olivia.<sup>972</sup>

In accordance with Muslim law that intends to preserve a segregation between men and women, the women’s prayer room should be separated from that of men in both mosques and shrines. This separation already existed in Gafsa and Sfax during the Zirid period and women prayed under the galleries behind a baked brick enclosure.<sup>973</sup> However, over time, stone enclosures morphed into decorative wooden screens, allowing women to see the imam during daily prayers. Inside the prayer room, the “*minbar*”, which is a high chair that the imam uses to pronounce the Friday preaching, represents one of the indispensable religious furniture in Tunisia. It is often movable, made of wood in Maliki mosques, fixed, and built of stone in Hanifi mosque, and inexistent in some Ibadite mosques. The states forced the Ibadite in Djerba and djebel Nafusa to mount “*minbars*” in their mosques, to perform the Friday ceremony as other mosques, and to build a niche to store them during the week.<sup>974</sup> The architectural niche “*mihrab*” meanwhile did not exist in the first mosques, but emerged at the end of the first century of the Hegira and gained over time in religious importance and value.<sup>975</sup> It indicates the direction of Mecca “*Qibla*”, where Muslims turn to pray, which reassembles to the concept of exedra in Roman basilicas. However, Muslims claim that it is their creation and differs in function, ornamentation, and religious value from the exedra. The “*mihrab*” of the Great Mosque of Kairouan represents one of the most beautiful, ancient, and best-preserved “*mihrabs*” in the Islamic world given its ornaments in marble and ceramic with metallic reflections. It should be noticed that Islamic prayers are not done directly on the floor, but rather on mats, carpets that generally cover the entire surface of the prayer hall, its walls, and pillars. This hygienic tradition goes back to the time of the prophet Muhammad who used a mat made from palm leaves for his daily prayers as well as Mâlik Ibn Anas.<sup>976</sup>

In Tunisia, according to their financial means, Mosques use rush mats or wool carpets to cover their floor and maintain this hygienic tradition. Several prayer carpets are produced in Kairouan

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<sup>971</sup> Harrison, P. (2004). *Castles of God: fortified religious buildings of the world*. Boydell Press, p. 229-230.

<sup>972</sup> Mami, B., & Béji, M. (2016) Great Mosque of Zaytuna. *Discover Islamic Art–Virtual Museum*, p. 1-77.

<sup>973</sup> Golvin, L. (1970). *Essai sur l'architecture religieuse musulmane. T. 1, Généralités*, p. 250.

<sup>974</sup> Schacht, J. (1954). *Sur la diffusion des formes d'architecture religieuse musulmane à travers le Sahara. Travaux de l'Institut de Recherches Sahariennes*, 11(1), p.17.

<sup>975</sup> Holm, J., & Bowker, J. W. (1994). *Sacred place*, éd. Pinter Publishers, p. 98

<sup>976</sup> Golvin 1970, p 241.

using the technique of Gördes knot to add to the carpet beautiful floral and geometric patterns and religious scripture.

Unit 3 will draw on two prayer carpets, eight photographs of highly famous mosques of different rites, and a short animated video that explains the architectural, conceptual, and decorative differences between Maliki, Hanafi, and Ibadite mosques. It is important that the animated film have a playful and captivating aspect to keep boredom at bay and enhance the perceived value of visitors.

 <p>Wool prayer mat with religious motif, Kairouan, 2020 © www.tapiskairouan.wordpress.com</p>	 <p>Foldable rush mat used to pray during a trip or displacement, Nabeul, 2018 © Hamdouni</p>
 <p>Great mosque, Kairouan (Maliki), © Mohamed Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com</p>	 <p>Prayer room, great mosque, Kairouan, © Mohamed Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com</p>
 <p>The Mihrab (9th cent) Great Mosque, Kairouan. © Mohamed Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com</p>	 <p>Minbar (9th cent) and maqsura (11th cent) Great Mosque, Kairouan, © Mohamed Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com</p>



Minaret of Hanafi rite, Youssef Dey mosque, Tunis. © Mohamed Hamdane, [www.culptr.blogspot.com](http://www.culptr.blogspot.com)



Prayer room, Youssef Dey mosque, Tunis. © Mohamed Hamdane, [www.culptr.blogspot.com](http://www.culptr.blogspot.com)



Ibadi mosque, Djerba, © Virginie Prévost [www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie)



Interior of an abandoned Ibadi mosque, Djerba. © Alex Derriks, [www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/tunisie)

#### Unit 4: Islamic Religious Symbols and Significance

Among the various symbols of Islam, the Quran is arguably one of the most revered and respected objects, as it represents the sacred book of the Islamic faith. Although Koran represents the unique symbol of Islam, other symbols have emerged with time to refer to this faith. Despite their use as a religious sign in Asia Minor before the arrival of Islam, the star and the crescent represent one of the most significant symbols of Islam. Their appropriation as religious symbols dates from the times of Babylon and ancient Egypt.<sup>977</sup> They symbolized the deity Artemis for the Greeks and the deity Diana for the Romans. Their adoption as an emblem for Islam is not found in Sharia or prophetic practice. They appeared after the Umayyad era in a date that has been the subject of controversy among historians. It is true that the Koran evoked the importance of the moon to fix the time of beginning and ending the fast of Ramadan, giving the Zakat, and to show the wisdom of God, but he prohibited its worship.<sup>978</sup> The same goes for

<sup>977</sup> At taratib al-Idariyya de Kattani, 1/320.

<sup>978</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:189 / Surah Al-Isra 7:12/ Surah Yunus 10:5. <https://quran.com>

the stars' prominence in deterring devils and establishing milestones to help people orient themselves,<sup>979</sup> but without venerating them.<sup>980</sup> The crescent spread throughout the Muslim world with the Turks, and countries such as Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, have included it in their flags. Tunisian mosques have crescents at the top of their minarets to help people identify their position but also to indicate the Kaaba direction (crescent opening). With the exception of crescent and star, other representations are prohibited inside the prayer room because of the sacredness of this space. Islamic sacred art is not figurative, which explains the presence only of arabesque decoration and geometric patterns adorned with calligraphic words from the Koran in mosques. Hanafi mosques are often without ornament, which is explained by the asceticism in this rite.

Tunisian Koranic calligraphy is exceptionally developed and has even become an art of devotion. The most developed styles are the Kufic (oldest Arabic script), characterized with an angular character, and Naskh, which is a cursive style much more rounded and mainly used for non-formal purpose. Islamic line adorns the interior of the mosque but also its exterior and minaret, which has also a symbolic meaning as a source of light that illuminates Muslim communities. The green became over time the colour of Islam because of the prophet's preference to this colour that he chose for his coat and turban.<sup>981</sup> This fact explains green in Koran binding, drapes, coverings holy tombs, flags on domes of mosques, or religious confraternities in Tunisia. Arabesque decorations, geometric patterns, and Koranic calligraphy that repeatedly uses the word Allah to evoke his presence in sacred places or even in private dwellings are also important symbols of the Islamic devotion.<sup>982</sup>

Unit 4 will draw on a crescent brooch, a necklace with crescent and star, a stone graving, sheet of the blue Quran with Kufic calligraphy, an earthenware dish with Naskh calligraphy, a green grave sheet with Koran verse, a painting of a Muslim wearing a green Turban, and a photograph of the dome of the shrine of Sidi Mahrez.

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<sup>979</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-An'am, 6:97 / Surah Al-Mulk 67:5.

<sup>980</sup> Qur'an, Surah Fussilat.

<sup>981</sup> Mu'assash al-Ma'arif (1986) *Majmau' al-Zawa'id wa Manba' al-Fawa'id*, Beirut.

<sup>982</sup> Grabar, O., & Thoraval, Y. (2000). *La formation de l'art islamique*. Flammarion, p. 1-334.

IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia



Gold brooch in the form of the crescent (symbol of Islam) Tunisia, 21st century, © Zara Daly



Gold plated necklace with crescent and star, Tunisia, 21st century, © collection of Zara Daly



Islamic Calligraphy (Naskh), old Earthenware Dish, Tunisia, 21st century, © www.pinterest.fr



Islamic calligraphy (kufi) Bardo Museum repository, early tenth century. © Hamdouni



Islamic engraving, confession of faith, Bab Mnara Tunis. © Hamdouni



Crescent and Islamic calligraphy, dome of the Sidi Mahrez © Hamdouni



painting of a Muslim wearing a green turban as act of Sunna, 2012 © www.aquaoa.canalblog.com



Green religious sheet, Tomb of Sidi Bounab, Degech, Tunisia. © M. Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com

### Unit 5: Islamic Protective Objects

Protection against evil eye occupies a primordial place in Islamic popular beliefs. Muslims use the Koran to produce healing and protective effects. Several testimonies attest that the prophet was a victim of the evil eye that destabilized him and influenced his behavior and feelings.<sup>983</sup> Theologically, the evil eye is a reality that could be preventable by asking God's protection against envious people and by reciting talismanic Surah called "*al-mu'awidhdhatân*".<sup>984</sup> With the invention of papyrus and parchment, several ritual practices that used Koranic script, astrological materials, and 28 Arabic alphanumeric signs quickly spread over the Islamic world. These protective scriptures are mounted in amulets or talismans worn permanently on the body in the form of belts, bracelets, or leather or fabric pendants. Tunisian amulets are often small leather bags with a yellow or green thread in which Koran verse, invocations to God, or grains of sand (from a holy man's tomb) are wrapped in a piece of paper or cloth. These amulets used to fight diseases, ward off magic and evil eye, and should not be opened in front of people or without ablutions to prevent losing their protective qualities.<sup>985</sup> The predominant signs engraved on the leather bags are the triangle, seal of Solomon, sun, square, rectangle, and the shape of an open hand. The used script is not an ordinary writing because it has no punctuation and has a magic character that only holy persons are able to write. The most used inks are black and blue; however, it is possible to find a yellow ink prepared with diluted saffron and musk.<sup>986</sup> The most famous amulets in Tunisia are the "*Hourze*", which is used to cure diseases and repel the evil eye, and the "*Adjheub*", to keep a good health.

It is important to note that amulets do not always contain verses from the Koran and could be a plant (henna), animal (chameleon), jewellery, and even a tattoo. Even if Islam prohibited permanent tattooing, this ceremonial and prophylactic tradition is very widespread in Tunisia and surpassed the religious prohibition. Old Tunisian women deemed Tattoos as remedies for so-called "*supernatural*" illnesses and against accident and child death. To protect themselves, they tattooed symbols such as crescents, vertical lines, diamonds, or lilies on their faces and right hand. Tunisian women, especially in rural areas, often wear a necklace of cloves or aromatic seeds called "*Skhab*" with small sachets containing shrub leaves to protect themselves

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<sup>983</sup> Wensinck, A. J. (1992) *Concordances et indices de la tradition musulmane*, E. J. Brill, 2e éd, p. 434-435.

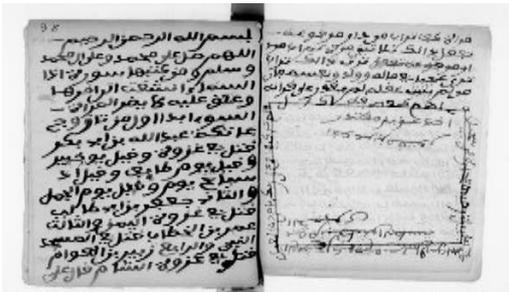
<sup>984</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-Falaq 113 and Surah An-Nas 114.

<sup>985</sup> Pallary, P. (1889). *Les amulettes arabes*. Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris, 12 (1), p 26.

<sup>986</sup> Ibid. p 29.

from disease. They also hang a “*khamisa*”, horseshoe, gazelle horn, or a stylized figure of a fish over their house entrance to ward off evil spirits.

Unit 5 will draw on two “*hourze*” horseshoe amulets, silver Koran holder, Berber necklace amulet, “*Skhab*” amber neckless, two prophylactic jewellery amulets, and two photographs of religious tattoos.



“Hourze” with religious script and magic square, Tunisia, ©www.culptr.blogspot.com



Horseshoe amulet, Tunis, 21st century, © collection of Mahmoud Nafeti



Copper “Hourze” against magic, Tunisia, 21st century, © collection of Mahmoud Nafati



Silver Koran holder decorated with “khamisa”, Tunisia, © M. Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com



“Skhab” necklace with amber pearls, Tunis, 21st century, © collection of Zara Daly



Berber necklace amulet with “khomsa”, Tunisia, © J. Porchez. www.culptr.blogspot.com



Silver amulet pendant with Quran calligraphy, Tunis, 21st century, © collection of Mahmoud Nafati



Silver amulet necklace with sura al Kursi, Tunis, 21st century, © collection of Zara Daly



Facial religious and prophylactic tattoo, Tunisia, © M. Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com



Ritual marking, right hand tattoo, south of Tunisia, © M. Hamdane, www.culptr.blogspot.com

### Unit 6: Islamic Ritualistic and Devotional Objects

The Koran, called also *al-kitab* (Book) or *al-furqan* (Discernment), is the highest esteemed object in Islam because it gathers God's eternal and inimitable transmitted to Muhammed by revelation from 610 to 632 AD. It contains 62,367 verses divided into 114 chapters, of which the first surah "*Al Fatiha*" (prologue) is recited to start every prayer unit "*rakah*".<sup>987</sup> After the prophet's death, the third caliph, Othman ibn Affan, fixed the official and final Koran recension, destroyed all other different copies, and made it a unique and unchanged text.<sup>988</sup> Even if the Koran represents a divine guidance and mercy that regenerate Muslims spiritually and psychologically, they neglected it during the early years of revelation, which made the prophet complain to God.<sup>989</sup> Nonetheless, the Quran acquired over time a primary importance in Muslims' religious and daily life who learned and memorized its surah in order to receive a

<sup>987</sup> Chebel, M. (2011). *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Coran*, Paris, Fayard, p. 105

<sup>988</sup> Moezzi, A., & Ali, M. (2020). *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant: sources scripturaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur*. CNRS Éditions, p. 77

<sup>989</sup> Qur'an Surah Al-Furqan 25:30.

divine blessing and spiritual guidance. Contrary to Christianity and Judaism, Islam has a distinction of using only a few furniture pieces for worship. With few exceptions, Tunisian mosques and Masjids are extremely modest and do not contain rich furniture, in particular those of Ibadite rite because they follow the Prophet Mosque model in Medina. Through lamps and chandeliers, luminaires form a light route in the prayer room that stresses the sacredness of the place. The brightness increases in front of the *mihrab* to highlight its sanctity and improve the visibility of the Imam. For praying, Tunisians use a carpet called *Sajada*, delimit a sacred space, and avoid impurity of the ground. To suit the prophet colour preference, it is often in green and carries a representation of *Mirhab*, Kaaba, or legs and hands positioning marks.<sup>990</sup> The prostration carpets help Muslims by low bowling and constitute one of the few paramount religious furniture in Islamic worship. Even if the overwhelming majority of Tunisian mosques are equipped with rugs, there is a trend of using a personal carpet during collective prayer for hygienic reasons. Prostration before Allah is one of the most relevant parts of ritual prayer and should be done through direct contact with the ground using the forehead, nose, both palms, both knees, and feet.<sup>991</sup> Apart from prayer prostration, there are also prostrations of thankfulness and recitation. Praying includes five body postures, and each posture expresses a whole attitude toward God. Books of Koran, Hadiths, *Tafsir* (exegesis), *Aqeeda* (creed), *Seerah* (prophetic biography) are objects of great value in Islamic worship because they ensure religious lessons and lecture before and after the prayer.

Unit 6 will draw on books of the Quran and hadiths with exegesis, prayer carpet and tunic, ablution stone, and two types of *Sabha*, which is an indispensable object to recite dhikr and glorify God. *Sabha* is composed of 99 pearls, equal to Allah's name, made from wood, ivory, or amber, and emerged in the Muslim world with the first crusade.



The Qur'an with explanation, Tunisia, 2019 © Hamdouni



Prayer set *Sajada*, *sabha*, and *hajret tayamom*, Tunisia, 2019 © Hamdouni

<sup>990</sup> Gulbelkian, S. (1891). *La fabrication des tapis en Orient*. Revue Archéologique, 17, p.162-164.

<sup>991</sup> Chelhod, J. (1959). *Les attitudes et les gestes de la prière rituelle dans l'Islam*. Revue de l'histoire des religions, p. 171.



Islamic prayer tunic, Qamis and skullcap, Tunisia, 2019, © Hamdouni



Ivory "Sabha", 2019, Tunisia © Hamdouni

### Unit 7: The Heirs of Abraham, Muhammad (Immersive Room)

Prophet Muhammed was born in 570 AD in a poor family that lived in a sedentary tribe in Mecca called "*Banu Hashim*".<sup>992</sup> He lost his father "*Abdullâh ibn `Abd al-Muttalib*" and his mother "*Amina bint Wahb*" at a very young age and had a difficult childhood. Unlike Jesus, mentioned a dozen times in the Quran, Muhammed is mentioned only four times, which does not provide many biographical elements about his life.<sup>993</sup> According to the hadith, God addressed him in a religious context three hundred and thirty-two times, and the revelation of the holy Quran lasted 23 years.<sup>994</sup> For Muslims, Muhammed is last prophet who completed the cycle of the Abrahamic revelation. During the "*Night of Destiny*", celebrated on the 27th of the month of Ramadan, Archangel Gabriel announced to Muhamad that God had chosen him as a prophet and repeatedly transmitted to him God's words (Koran) during more than twenty years. His first woman Khadija was the first person who followed his preaching, contrary to his tribe that considered him a hallucinating mad man. Although it was hard for the "*Makkans*" to abandon their ancestral beliefs and convert to Islam, Mahomet succeeded in in five years in convincing around a hundred faithful to convert to Islam.<sup>995</sup> He defended poor persons and justice values, which undermined the social status of rich families and triggered problems with the tribe leaders. His enemies pushed him to leave Mecca in 622 AD and move to *Yathreb*.<sup>996</sup> After his *Higra* (immigration), he became head of the first Muslim community in history, which gathered the *Makkans*, new converts from Medina, Jewish clans, Christians, and polytheist

<sup>992</sup> Mantran, R. (2001). *De l'Arabie anté-islamique à la mort de Mohammed dans L'expansion musulmane*, p 70-82.

<sup>993</sup> Langhade, J. (1994). *Du Coran à la philosophie: la langue arabe et la formation du vocabulaire philosophique de Farabi* p 112.

<sup>994</sup> Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (1991) *Kitāb asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Kamāl Basyūnī Zaghlūl, Beirut, p. 3.

<sup>995</sup> Déroche, F. (2007). *Mahomet*, in Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi (dir.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Robert Laffont, p. 512-516.

<sup>996</sup> It is called now Medina, which means in Arabic the city of the prophet.

Arabs. Several battles opposed the new converts to Meccans, which ended with the victory of *Badr* in 629, and made from the prophet the most powerful man of Medina. Shortly afterward, Mohamed made from the pre-Islamic city Mecca the holiest place of Islam. However, after his death in 632, his companions preferred to bury him in his house in Medina.

The Koran and hadiths attribute several miracles to Muhammad, such as healing, multiplication of food, making rainfall, weaving a spider web, and establishing a pigeon nest in front of a cave entrance to escape his enemies.<sup>997</sup> Through interactive display tools such as 3D mapping, touch panels, video projection, and a short film (biographical), the projection hall will provide visitors with an overview into the episodes of Muhammed's life, such as his childhood, arrival to Medina, and miracles. Touch panels will allow visitors to scroll photographs such as Hira's cave, the Quran illuminated in ultraviolet light, the grave of the Prophet, and his genealogical tree. It is important to stress that the video will not show his facial representation to prevent offending religious feeling. According to my empirical investigation in chapter 3, affording respect for religious beliefs, feelings, and sensibilities is a primary factor in ensuring visitors' perceived value, which is an aim in itself to guarantee satisfaction and loyalty.

### 2.2. The Second Floor: Common Values of the Abrahamic Religions

Abraham's awareness of the existence of a universal metaphysical dimension is seen as one of the reasons that gave birth to the concept of monotheism that draws on a relationship with God based on ethics and implies sharing, social justice, and responsibility. With the exception of a few differences, some common notions and values mark the Abrahamic religions. For instance, the notion of an oriented time fitted with a beginning, an unfolding, and an end expectation is a common faith pillar in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The apprehension of time is an essential element in the organization of religious experiences, which gives the symbolic system a meaning. The notion of time is not cyclical but rather oriented by a relationship between human beings with God and charged with a future promise. In line with this, the flood played a primordial role as a temporal event oriented toward the regeneration of space and time.<sup>998</sup> Eliade's approach on the distinction between profane and sacred time is a key element to

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<sup>997</sup> Woodward, K. L. (2001). *The book of miracles: The meaning of the miracle stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam*. Simon and Schuster.p. 189

<sup>998</sup> Bremond d'Ars, N. D. (2007). *Le temps et la destinée humaine*. Turnhout, Brepols, coll. «Homo religiosus» série II, Archives de sciences sociales des religions, (140), p. 300.

understanding religious experience, which divides time into two "spaces", one ruled by gods, and the other (everyday life) by humans.

In Abrahamic religions, the physical time of human beings is intermingled with a divine time. By inserting sacred times into profane time, faithful weave a closer relationship with history, as is the case with Jewish diaspora, Jesus's life and death, and Koran revelation. It is important to stress that several scholars in the studies of religion do not share the theory of common essence, core, homogeneity, and inclusion of these religions and have even questioned the validity of the term Abrahamic religions. Aaron W. Hughes claims that this term is an invented designation that seeks a form of contentment to accept religious otherness and to enter into an interfaith dialogue. Hughes emphasizes its unexplained change from a symbol of exclusion to a natural category that symbolizes inclusion and attachment, which limits the understanding of religion.<sup>999</sup> My concept stresses the continuity, discontinuity, sharing, and division between these religions, which guarantees a terminological clarity and intellectual integrity for the visitors. It is important to emphasize that there is an expected fusion between human historical time and final divine time in these religions, which should acquire a material form in this concept. Considering these factors, I suggest for this floor three envelopes in which time and sacredness play a primordial role: religious calendar and feast, cycle of life, and message and precepts of the Abrahamic religion.

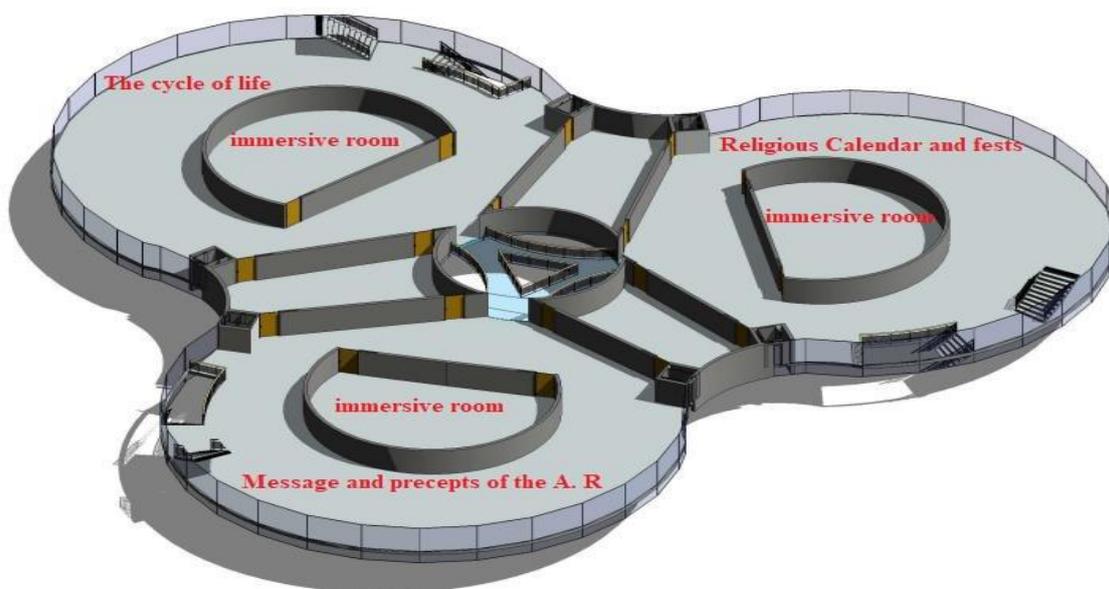


Figure 50. The thematic repartition of the second floor. ©Hamdouni

<sup>999</sup> Hughes, A. W. (2012). *Abrahamic religions: On the uses and abuses of history*. Oxford University Press, p. 1-191.

Unlike the first floor that provided different soundscapes and acoustically separated the envelopes, I suggest conceiving a personalized acoustic atmosphere for the whole floor in order to stress religions' crossing and sharing aspects and add to its scenography a special touch. Since soundscapes draws often on distinguishable voices or sound, I would use indistinguishable soundbites of people praying in Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin to create an atmosphere of prayer instead of presenting recognisable prayers. Such soundscape that has been used in the exposure "*Shared Holy Places*" would engage the visitors and awake their curiosity in trying to distinguish the language, which keeps them from boredom. It is very important to provide an acoustic comfort on this floor and not to exceed sound pressure level (28-35) designed for museums.

##### **2.2.1. Sequence 1: Religious Calendar and Fests**

As the Islamic calendar, the Jewish calendar has also a structuring role that gives the moon a paramount place in setting religious fest and revealing God's presence in physical time. Similarly, the Christian calendar determines liturgical dates and the relationship of faithful with food and wealth. The Hebrew calendar is a lunisolar calendar made up of lunar months and seven-day weeks that begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday (Shabbat day). The Jewish era began in year 3761 BC, which, according to biblical accounts, corresponds to the date of creation of Man. The calendar that determinates Jewish holidays and Torah portions for public reading follows the sun cycle, which makes twelve lunar months of twenty-nine or thirty days and three hundred and fifty-four days. The Months of the Babylonian calendar are Nisan, Iyyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Tishri, Kheshvan, Kislev, Shevat, Adar and, \*Adar II. This calendar implies an addition of a thirteenth month once every two or three years to restore the shift of eleven days due to solar and lunar difference. Jews celebrate their New Year "*Rosh haShana*" on first "*Tishri*" to commemorate the world creation, eating apples dipped in honey and fish heads in order to have a smooth and fertile year. Jews fix their religious fests according to the agricultural seasons of solar year, unlike the Islamic synodic calendar "*Higri*" that comprise lunar cycles of twelve months of 29 or 30 days and do not restore the shift of eleven days.<sup>1000</sup> The start of each month depends on moon visibility and each month begins with a new lunar cycle.

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<sup>1000</sup> Auclair, R. (April 2003). *Les mesures du temps*, Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada / Journal de la Société royale d'astronomie du Canada, vol. 97, no 2, p. 54-59.

Consequently, Islamic religious feasts advance from ten to twelve days a year and the holy month Ramadan, which carries out a complete round of the Gregorian calendar every thirty-six years. The Islamic New Year begins with Muharram, followed by Safar, Rabi al-awwal, Rabi al-thani, Jumada al-awwal, Jumada al-thani, Rajab, Shaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhul Qadah, and Dhul Hijja. The Sunna forbids Muslims from entering into conflict or waging war during these four months: Dhul Qadah, Dhul-Hijja, Muharram, and Rajab given their sacredness in Islam.<sup>1001</sup>

### Unit 1: Religious Calendars in Tunisia

The Christian calendar is principally solar with the exception of three feasts: Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. The Catholic liturgical year includes another two cardinal festivals called Christmas and Epiphany. The Christian era began on January 1, the day of Jesus' circumcision, which is eight days after his birth, set on December 25th.<sup>1002</sup> The West uses the Gregorian calendar of Pope Gregory XIII made in 1582 and the East uses the Julian calendar of Julius Caesar in 46 BC. The Julian calendar has similarities with the Amazigh calendar in terms of inherited shift of the Gregorian calendar reform.<sup>1003</sup> The Amazigh calendar dominates North Africa, particularly south Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco and regulates tribes' seasonal agricultural work. It shifts by 950 years compared to the Gregorian calendar and started from accession to power of the first Libyan pharaoh "Sheshonq" in Egypt. The names of the months differ according to linguistic variations in North Africa. Tunisian Berbers of Djerba call them as follows: Yennayer, Furáyer, Marsu, Ibrír, Mayu, Yunyu, Yulyu, Awussu, Ctamber, Ktúber, Numbír and Dujámber. The date of February 10, 2020 in the Gregorian calendar corresponds to January 28, 2020 in the Julian calendar, to Chevat 16, 5780 in the Hebrew calendar, to Jomada Al-Thani 16, 1441 in the Hijri calendar, and to Yennayer 29, 2970 in the Amazigh calendar. Such fragmentation and divergence represent a striking characteristic of religious time, which unlike physical time made up of quantifiable units, does not have a regular succession and may have some interruptions.<sup>1004</sup>

Unit 1 will draw on a Tunisian Hijri calendar, a page of a Tunisian Almanac of the year 1999, and two photographs of Jewish and Amazigh calendars of the year 2930 and the year 5723.

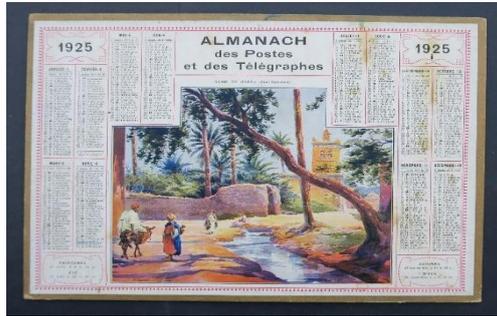
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<sup>1001</sup> Sahih Al Bukhari, Hadith 3197 of the book of the beginning of creation

<sup>1002</sup> Goldberg, S.-A. (2014) *La Clepsydre : Essai sur la pluralité des temps dans le judaïsme*, Albin Michel, p. 1-492.

<sup>1003</sup> Battesti, V. (2000). *Les échelles temporelles des oasis du Jérid tunisien*. *Anthropos*, p. 419-425.

<sup>1004</sup> Spineto, N. (2007). *Le temps et la destinée humaine à la lumière des religions et des cultures*, Brepols, p. 23.



Christian calendar with day feasts, Tunisia, 1925, © Collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Higri Calendar of year 1439-1440, (2018), © Hamdouni



Amazigh calendar of the year 2930, 1980 in Gregorian and 1401 in Higri, Algeria © decolonizingalgeria.wordpress.com



Religious holiday calendar of the Hebrew year 5723 (1963), Tunisia @Uzan fere et fils

## Unit 2: The Holy Day of Worship: A Question of Demarcation?

The Jewish sacred day is Sabbath, which is the weekly day of rest and worshipping. During it, faithful cease all activity and gather themselves to worship God and help those in need.<sup>1005</sup> It is of great importance for the Jews because it refers to the connection with eternity and aims to celebrate God's glory.<sup>1006</sup> In Hebrew, Shabbat means cessation and designates the day of cessation of work to pray and rest. However, according to Jesus' words and deeds, it is not a day of laziness empty of all activities; on the contrary, it should be devoted for help, alms, charity, hospitably, and particularly for preaching.<sup>1007</sup> Sabbath refers to the seventh creation day in which God blessed, sanctified, and rested on that day.<sup>1008</sup> It is devoted for faithful to discharge

<sup>1005</sup> Leviticus 23: 3

<sup>1006</sup> Möller, F. P. (2019). *Three perspectives on the Sabbath*. In *die Skriflig*, 53(1), p. 1-10.

<sup>1007</sup> Matthew 12: 7

<sup>1008</sup> Genesis 2:1-3

all their burdens and renew their physical and spiritual strength. It is also a Memorial Day to remind of God's creative, sovereign, and redemptive power and that faithful show respect and fear for him.<sup>1009</sup> Sabbath is a mandatory commandment for Jews and represents a sign of a perpetual covenant established between God and his faithful.<sup>1010</sup> God has promised those who honour the Shabbat his grace as well as spiritual blessing.<sup>1011</sup> It is a rest on earth that foreshadows the eternal rest that God promised his faithful. God chose the seventh day to be the Sabbath but did not specify which day it has to be, which explains why the Israelites start their rest from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.<sup>1012</sup>

Jesus and his apostles performed Sabbath as God asked, and the apostolic Church continued to read the religious texts every Sabbath in the synagogues even after Jesus' resurrection. Today, most churches observe Sunday instead of Sabbath for the reason that Jesus resurrected on Sunday. According to the New Testament, Christians should celebrate Sunday in memory of the Lord's resurrection.<sup>1013</sup> Although Jesus' resurrection is of paramount importance in the history of salvation, there is no passage in the Bible recommending the church to observe on his resurrection day. Sunday observance for Christians has no biblical foundation; however, it morphed with the impact of the Roman Catholic Church into a religious tradition to distinguish itself from Judaism. In 364, the Church abandoned with a decree of Laodicean Council the observance of Sabbath and established the sanctification of Sunday, and 174 years later the church imposed Sunday as a worship day, prohibited the Sabbath, and imposed penalties up to death on all offenders. Christian denominations that recognize Sunday as a sacred day claim that the New Testament initiated a new freedom era that forsook Jewish observance and chose Sunday and Jesus' resurrection as a "*new creation*".<sup>1014</sup>

It is important to specify that the Eucharist represent the Sunday mass core because it gives meaning and purpose to the faithful to rebuild themselves spiritually, pray to God, celebrate Jesus' resurrection, and strengthen their family ties. Sunday mass is a reminder for faithful of the Bible passage that "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'".<sup>1015</sup> At mass, collective prayers are stronger with others' presence, prostration, and meditation. This logic of spiritual nourishment in a specific day and

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<sup>1009</sup> Exodus 20: 8–11, Ezekiel 20: 20

<sup>1010</sup> Exodus 31: 16–17

<sup>1011</sup> Isaiah 58: 13–14

<sup>1012</sup> Exodus 16: 25–26

<sup>1013</sup> Mark 16: 9

<sup>1014</sup> Bacchiocchi, S. (1984). *Du Sabbat au Dimanche, une recherche historique sur les origines du Dimanche chrétien*, Lethielleux, p 303-304.

<sup>1015</sup> Matthew 4:4

collective prayer links Judaism with Christianity and Islam. The question that arises is whether Islam has also inherited the Jewish creation already adopted and amended by Christians.

Several historians claim that Muhammed chose Friday as a day of worship to distinguish Islam from other religions and to set against Jew and Christian tradition.<sup>1016</sup> Other scholars consider such approach extremely controversial, if not prejudiced, and claim that he chose Friday as it was Jews' usual market day, which ensured a large number of people and represented an excellent opportunity to gather them for praying. Friday is for Muslims not necessarily a weekly day of rest but rather a holy day deemed for the great collective prayer called "*salat Al-Jumua*" that brings the most benefits. In most countries with a Muslim majority, Friday is a public holiday, unlike Tunisia that has inherited Sunday rest from French law. In Islam, there is no specific moment of the week for worship, however, God blessed praying on Friday and added its virtues. The prophet mentioned that Allah's preferred day is Friday, which has to be a congregation day.<sup>1017</sup> Moreover, the surah 62 of the Koran is called "*Al-Jumua/Friday*", in which God asked his faithful to adore him on Friday and to leave all commercial transactions during prayer time.<sup>1018</sup> Before praying, faithful listen to the Imam Sermon and moral discourse that inform more about Islam and good behavior. It is important to stress that fragrances play a major role in the Abrahamic religions to purify the places of worship and even individuals. Many products such as scented liturgical oils, incense, and odoriferous products are used for purification. Such practices persist in churches, synagogues, and mosques, which favour the use of censers and include them in their furniture.

This unit will be composed of two incense burners, a ram's horn (shofar), and three photographs of Sunday mass, Friday ceremony, and Shabbat shofar blowing. The choice of objects as well as photos refer to the importance of three senses in religious practice: Sight (height of material used for preaching), smell (incense and its protective function), and sound (beginning of a ritual).

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<sup>1016</sup> Gaudefroy-Demombynes, M. (1957). *Mahomet l'evolution de l'humanite*. Paris: Editions Albin Michel, p. 522.

<sup>1017</sup> Al Bayhaqi, Silsila Sahiha n ° 1502, retrieved from [bibliotheque-islamique.fr/hadith/silsila-sahiha-volume-4/](http://bibliotheque-islamique.fr/hadith/silsila-sahiha-volume-4/)

<sup>1018</sup> Qu'ran, Surah Al-Jumu'ah 62:9-10



Rabbi Biton blowing the shofar, Djerba, Tunisia, 2018. © Ari Zivotofsky, www.segulamag.com



Rams horn shofar used to announce the start of Shabbat. © collection of David Gharbi



Friday prayers, Zitouna Mosque, Tunis, 2012. © Yosra Ouannès www.aa.com.tr



Islamic incense burner, Tunisia, 20th century, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



Sunday mass, February 2020, cathedral of Tunis, © cathedral Facebook page.



Censer with 12 bells for Catholic and orthodox church, Tunisia, 20th century, © collection of Verbrunia Aras

### Unit 3: Major Religious Holidays “Passover, Easter and Eid-el-Kabir”

Passover is a major religious holiday in Jewish tradition and one of the three-pilgrimage feasts in which Israelites celebrate in Jerusalem temples the exodus and agricultural cycle start. This commemoration feast of liberation lasts seven days in Israel and eight days in diaspora from

the 14th to the 22nd of the Hebrew month Nissan, which is between mid-March and mid-April. It regroups two biblical celebrations called "*hag hamatzot*" (unleavened feast) in which faithful should only consume unleavened bread, and the "*korban Pesach*" (Easter offering) for the sacrifice of one year lamb.<sup>1019</sup> On the morning before Passover begins, Jews remove or burn all leaven in their homes and block "*Chametz food*" from purchase in the supermarket. They roast the lamb, eat it with unleavened bread after having marked the lintels of their houses with its blood, and use it as sign to avoid God's scourge. The tradition of eating lamb at Easter is widespread among Jews in Tunisia and reminds of the Islamic Eid-el-Kabir in terms of importance. It also precedes the day of Seder, which is a highly symbolic Jewish ritual that aims to remind the faithful of the slavery in Egypt and accession to freedom. The Seder consists of a symbolic meal consisting of unleavened bread, Karpas (green herbs), Maror (bitter herbs), Haroseth (mixture of dates, nuts, and almond), Beša (a hard-boiled egg), Zerowa' (a bone) and salt water. Jews should serve all these ingredients in a specific tray and each ingredient has a religious symbolism and recalls a period or event that marked the Jewish exodus from Egypt. Jews also started to eat rice in Passover after the authorization of its consumption by the rabbinic authorities because of the famine that hit Tunisia in the last decades. On the 8th day of the Passover, Tunisian Jews go in a procession called "*Kharja*" while singing the "*Haggada*".<sup>1020</sup>

In Sunnism, Muslims fast on the day of "*Ashurah*" (10th of Muharram) to commemorate the Jews' exodus and celebrate God's creation of a path through the Red Sea for Moses to escape from Pharaoh.<sup>1021</sup> The fasting of "*Ashurah*" is an act of compassion and remembrance and traditionally rooted in Tunisian Islamic culture that reveals a religious interbreeding, tolerance, and human solidarity with Jews. This religious crossbreeding and continuation of Jewish Passover could be seen in Christians' Good Friday, in which Jesus had been crucified as the Passover Lamb.<sup>1022</sup> Christians consider Easter as one of the most valuable liturgical feasts of Christianity. It commemorates the Last Supper of the Eucharist, Jesus' crucifixion, and his resurrection two days after his Passion. It marks the end of the Christian Lent on the first Sunday after the first full moon that follows March 21. Easter liturgy begins with the Easter Vigil in which faithful often receive the sacrament of baptism or confirmation, remember their religious duties, and renew their spiritual power. It represents one of the very rare occasions for the Pope to pronounce the solemn blessing "*Urbi et Orbi*". During the night preceding the Resurrection

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<sup>1019</sup> Exodus 12: 1-13; 14-20.

<sup>1020</sup> history and adventures of the Hebrews that forced them to flee as narrated in the Hebrew Bible

<sup>1021</sup> Morrow, J. A. (Ed.). (2013). *Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism*. McFarland, p. 234–36.

<sup>1022</sup> Leonhard, C. (2012). *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter*. Walter de Gruyter, studia Judaica, p. 5-407

mass, the fire of the Paschal candle is lit again while blessing the baptismal font and reading the prophecies. Easter reminds of many ancient customs that celebrate spring's return and nature's rebirth by offering deities the first harvest fruits as gifts for fertilization and germination. For instance, the Easter egg is not a Judeo-Christian tradition because it belongs to creation histories of many cultures and civilizations. In Judaism, it symbolizes life cycles and belongs to mourning and Seder meals, and in Christianity it stands for the resurrection of the Christ from his tomb as a chick comes out of the egg.<sup>1023</sup> In Tunis, Christians celebrate Easter at the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Cathedral where three solemn masses take place, the first in Italian and the other two in French. Up to now, there is not an Easter mass given in Arabic due to the small number of Tunisian Christians and the fluent spoken French in Tunis. Even though the Christian tradition "*Lammele*" ceased to exist in the last decades and the betrothed ceased to offer a paschal lamb to his fiancée, Tunisian Muslims still practice a similar tradition called "*mawsem*" on "*Eid-el-Kabir*". Tunisian men offer a part of lamb to his groom as a promise renewal.

Eid-el-Kabir, which signifies the great feast, is one of the most important religious and the holiest tradition celebrated in the Islamic world. The celebration of the sacrifice marks the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca on the 10th day of the month "*Dhu al-Hijjah*" and commemorates the submission of Abraham to God's order to sacrifice his eldest son. It lasts three days and consists of sacrificing a sheep by slaughtering it, lying on its left side, its head turned toward Mecca. This ritual is mandatory for families that can financially offer it. With this celebration, Muslims borrow the way of Abraham and God as mentioned in the prophetic tradition and Koran.<sup>1024</sup>

This unit will be composed of a Seder copper tray, Haggadah, Easter egg, cooking utensils and four photographs and an animated video to provide visitors with an overview of the major religious festivals in Tunisia. The screen will be fitted with an earpiece to reduce the sound noise, as was the case in the exhibit "Shared Holy Places".

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<sup>1023</sup> Geddes, G., & Griffiths, J. (2002). *Christian belief and practice : the Roman Catholic tradition*, Oxford : Heinemann p. 110-115

<sup>1024</sup> Quran Surah Al-Kawthar 108:2.



Seder copper tray engraved with circular Arabic inscription, North Africa, 20th century. © mahJ



Passover Haggadah in Hebrew, Tunisia, 1930-1950. © mahJ



The procession of the 8th day of Passover, Tunis, 20th century, © Victor Hayoun, www.harissa.com



Easter Vigil, Church of the Sacred Heart, Tunis, Press of 1956, © National Archives of Tunisia



Cloisonné enamel Easter egg, Tunisia, 21st century, © collection of Verbrunia Aras



Easter Sunday, cathedral of Tunis, 2018 © cathedrale Facebook page.



Eid prayer, Malek Ibn Anas mosque, Tunis, 2019 © www.mosaiquefm.net



Zogdida utensils (couscoussier, kanoun) for traditionally cooking aid dishes. <https://femmesdetunisie.com/>

**Unit 4: The Celebration of Revelation: Shavuot, Pentecost and Night of Ordainment**

Shavuot is the second pilgrimage festival of Judaism that commemorates the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai and ends the seven weeks after Passover.<sup>1025</sup> On Shavuot evening, women light a candle in honour of Yom tov and recite the Kiddush blessing. Its liturgical ritual includes a prayer of seven blessings, followed by reading the "*Hallel*" based on Psalms 113-118 and ends with an additional prayer service called "*Mussaf*". Tunisian Jews celebrate it for two days on the 6th day of the Jewish month Sivan by eating mostly bread in memory of the two loaves. Similarly, Tunisian Christians celebrate the Pentecost on the fiftieth day from Easter to commemorate the Holy Spirit outpouring on Jesus' disciples and Apostles (120 persons) who received the divine inspiration in the Cenacle of Jerusalem.<sup>1026</sup> Although Pentecost is rooted in the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, it represents the church's starting point for public mission and fulfils the promise of Christ to his apostles.<sup>1027</sup> In Tunisia, Pentecost is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter without granting the following Monday as a public holiday. Catholics celebrate it with a mass in which they sing the Gregorian sequence "*Veni Sancte Spiritus*" and read the Bible. In Islam, the night of Ordainment or "*Laylat al-Qadr*" is one of the most blessed nights of the year. It happens in one of the last ten nights of Ramadan, which extends the devotions over several nights.<sup>1028</sup> It commemorates the night of year 610 in which the angel Gabriel revealed the Koran to Muhammad in the cave of Hira.<sup>1029</sup> Muslims celebrate it with a collective nocturnal prayer and reading of Quran, which resembles Shavuot and its nocturnal reading of the Torah.

Unit 4 will draw on Kiddush glass, an engraving, a sheet of the Quran, and a photograph.



Silver Kiddush glass used during Shavuot, Tunisia, 20th century, © Collection of Laurence Roux



Engraving, Holy Spirit Pentecote, New Testament Infolio XVIII, © collection of Verbrunia Aras.

<sup>1025</sup> Baslez, M. F. (2003). *Bible et Histoire*, éd. Gallimard, coll. Folio Histoire, p. 219-235.

<sup>1026</sup> Lémonon, J. P. (1998). *L'Esprit Saint*, éditions de l'Atelier p. 88-89.

<sup>1027</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>1028</sup> The five first verses of Sura 97 (Al-Qadr /Destiny) stress the importance of this night.

<sup>1029</sup> Qur'an, Sourate Ad-Dukhan 44: 2-4.



Surah Al-Qadr, Koran, Tunisia, 2019 © Aymen Hamdouni



Laylat Al-Qadr Al-Zaytuna Mosque, Tunisia, 2017, © Yassine Gaidi. © www.middleeastmonitor.com

### Unit 5: Penance, Atonement, Reconciliation and Purification Through Fasting

Yom Kippur is the holy day of atonement in Judaism in which Jews used to offer sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>1030</sup> It aims at cleansing, forgiveness of sins, strengthening faith, rectifying habits, and purification through an immersion in the Mikveh. It is set at the tenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, implies a solemn 25-hour fast, and prohibits any form of activity, conflict, or even argument. The overwhelming majority of Jews observe it with different degrees in order to atone for committed faults and sins. Observing Yom Kippur and fasting is compulsory for all healthy persons over 12 years for women and 13 for men. Sephardic Jews, including Tunisians, celebrate Yom Kippur with joyful music and white clothing to recall the desire of an atonement from sins and purification.<sup>1031</sup> Men cover themselves in a tallit to observe the prayer of "*Kol Nidre*" and "*ma'ariv*" and ask for forgiveness for faults committed against God and not those committed against others. Tunisian Jews break their fast with a sweet lemonade, a crunchy almond with quince jam, and a chicken or meat broth as the main dish.

Christian Lent closely resembles Yom Kippur in terms of purification, reconciliation, and devotion to God. It is however much longer in duration, lasts forty days, and combines an alternation between a complete fasting as in Islam, Judaism, and an abstinence (partial fasting). Christian fasting extends from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday and becomes softer on Sundays and Annunciation day without being completely interrupted. Lent represents a period of spiritual deepening and preparation to commemorate Jesus's Passion and Resurrection. Lent started in Catholicism in the fourth century in reference to Jesus's forty days of fasting in the

<sup>1030</sup> Mishnah Yoma 8:9.

<sup>1031</sup> Jews men wears white tunic called Kittel during solemn celebrations.

desert.<sup>1032</sup> However, apart from fasting, observing the lent draws on two other major practices: sharing and almsgiving to help poor people and praying to get closer to God. These practices closely resemble Muslims' observation during Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Hijri calendar and the only one mentioned in the Quran. It is a holy month of charity, purification, and reconciliation through fasting, which is an important pillar of Islam. Muslims should not eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Its observation requires a nocturnal prayer and Koran lecture called "*Tarawih*", and ends with an alms for poor people called "*zakat al-fitr*". The feast of "*Eid al-fitr*" marks the breaking of the fast and includes an early morning prayer at the mosque and visiting close relatives.

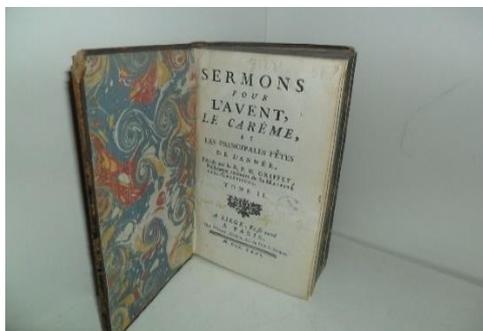
Unit 5 will draw on a Jewish tallit, a lent sermon, a candle set for Ramadan, and a photograph of Yom Kippur observation in Tunisia. A documentary of four minutes will enhance unit 5 with an interactive aspect and provide visitors with an insight into fasting practices in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and its specificities in the Tunisian tradition.



Tallit Shawl, North Africa, 20th century, © mahJ



Yom Kippur, Tunisia, 2015 © thearabweekly.com



Lent sermons, France, 18th century, © collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Candle set for Ramadan decorated with religious words, Tunisia, 2019, © Hamdouni

<sup>1032</sup> This episode is mentioned in the three synoptic gospels: Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

**Unit 6: Feasts of Gratitude and Commemoration Between Religious Basis and Folkways**

Hanukkah is a Jewish feast of gratitude that commemorates the re-inauguration of the Second Temple of Jerusalem and the return to Jewish worship after revolting against the Hellenistic power. It commemorates the oil vial miracle used to light the candlestick of the Temple that lasted eight days instead of one day and gave time to Jews to make new oil. Jews celebrate the Feast of Lights for eight days starting from 25 “*kislev*”, in which fasting and eulogies are not prohibited.<sup>1033</sup> Even if Hanukkah has no sacred character or an ordained biblical ritual, it gained over time a specific liturgy that varies according to regions. In Tunisia, reading the Psalm at the synagogue and lighting candles on the evening of the eight days are the most widespread rituals in the country. Tunisian Jews use a special candlestick called “*Menorah*” fuelled with olive oil and wicks of wool in memory of Jerusalem Temple. They also play a game of luck using a four-sided spinning top with Hebrew letters called a “*dreidel*”.<sup>1034</sup> During the same month, Christians celebrate their own feast of light in memory of the birth of Jesus and the beginning of an illuminated life of spirituality.

From the fourth century, Christians celebrate on December 25 the start of the new liturgical year through a midnight mass. Even if Christmas still preserve a part of its religious setting in form of masses, it is deemed as a secular celebration for family reunification, festive meal, and exchange of gifts. Mawlid, which is a worldwide celebration that commemorates the birth of the prophet Muhammed, has also gained over time a secular character and became a cultural and culinary feast. Apart from the recitation of the Koran, Tunisians cook a pastry cream made from Aleppo pine nuts to celebrate the birth of the prophet. Although Mawlid has no reference in the Koran and Sunnah, it is deemed as an imitation of Christmas.<sup>1035</sup> This feast became a public holiday in most Muslim countries.

Unit 6 will draw on a Hanukkah lamp, a Dreidel, Wood egg icon, and three photographs of Christmas mass, Mawlid, and Hanukkah in Tunisia.

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<sup>1033</sup> Gugenheim, E. (1992). *Le Judaïsme dans la vie quotidienne*, coll. Présences du judaïsme, éd. Albin Michel, Paris, tome 1, p. 131–137.

<sup>1034</sup> Hanukkah top remind also the miracle of Jerusalem since its four letters means that “a great miracle took place there”.

<sup>1035</sup> Ibn Hadj (n.d) *Al Madkhal*, Beirut: Dar al-Turath, volume 2, p. 11-12.



Hanukkah lamp with a shamash bearing an inscription, Tunisia, 19th century, © mahJ



Sterling Silver Dreidel, Children's Hanukkah Game, © www.etsy.com



Wood egg icon, birth of Christ, France, 21st century, © collection of Verbrunia Aras



Feast of Mawlid for religious songs and praises, kairouan, 2018. © www.directinfo.web

### 2.2.2. Sequence 2: The Cycle of Life

Different stages *mark* the life of individuals that begins with the birth, goes through circumcision, religious majority, marriage, and ends with the death.<sup>1036</sup> Funerals stress the deceased separation from their community, while the birth rites mark their integration into a new religious and social environment. The life cycle is characterized by a ternary sequential structure: integration, preliminary, and separation rites, in which the body forms a centre of action that changes the religious status or generate a new identity. It is important to underline that the rites of passage, which involves persons of the same sex, differ from initiation rites that mark an incorporation of selected persons into a social or religious group.<sup>1037</sup> However, all these practices mark a social recognition, an access to a new stage in the life cycle, and, more importantly, a belonging to religious society.

<sup>1036</sup> Van Gennep, A. (2000). *Les rites de passage*, Paris, Picard, p. 12-16.

<sup>1037</sup> Cros, M., & Besse, S. (1996). *Terrains de passage: rites de jeunesse dans une province Française*. Editions L'Harmattan.

### Unit 1: Birth, Circumcision, and Baptism

In Jewish tradition, pregnancy is a time of deep reflection, readings, spirituality, but mostly for discussions with a rabbi. A child's birth represents a divine blessing and requires a set of rituals and customs to ensure a smooth birth. A birth sheet called in Tunisia "*ouraket en nechfa*" is the first religious object that accompanies the parturient during the childbirth. This printed leaf that contains cabalistic symbols and formulas such as two opposite keys, two rosettes, two palms, two fish, and two lions represents a religious support for the woman and her child.<sup>1038</sup> The duration of festivities depends on child's sex, if the newborn is female, it has to be short and ends with the "*Sab'a*" celebration (seventh day) in which the rabbi blesses the girl's name. If the newborn is male, he goes through a circumcision ceremony called "*brit milah*" on his eighth day of life. In cases of the first-born child, the festivities last almost four weeks. The circumcision ritual is as follows: a circumciser called "*mohel*" who has no children sits on a high chair, holds the child on their knees, and excises the foreskin under religious songs.

Similarly, in Islamic tradition, a talisman with protective Surah accompanies the parturient during childbirth.<sup>1039</sup> Once the child is born, Sunnah prompts to pronounce a call of prayer "*al-Adhane*" in his right ear and the al-Iqama (second call of prayer) in his left ear. The lips of a newborn should be touched with sweet juice or pressed dates and honey, and if the parents can afford it, a sheep should be sacrificed "*al 'Aqiqa*" on the seventh day to bless the child. During "*al 'Aqiqa*", Muslims often circumcise their child in memory of the prophet's son's circumcision.<sup>1040</sup> The "*khitân*" is strongly widespread among Muslims even it is not prescribed in the Koran. Many Scholars attribute it to a Jewish influence after their conversion to Islam in the time of the prophet.<sup>1041</sup> Almost 68% of men circumcised in the world are Muslims who performed the ritual of "*khitân*" between birth and puberty.<sup>1042</sup> In the New Testament, Luke mentioned the circumcision of Jesus on his eighth day of life.<sup>1043</sup> Catholic and Orthodox Churches still celebrate the feast of Circumcision, although the practice itself has weakened over time.<sup>1044</sup> Several Coptic Churches in Egypt and Ethiopia and communities in Tunisia and

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<sup>1038</sup> Allali et al 2005, p. 139.

<sup>1039</sup> The protective surah in the Qur'an are El-Fâtiha Al-Baqara Al-Ikhlâs Al-Falaq and An-Nâs. Jasmi, K. A. Manzil: Daily Quranic Verses as Protection for Ourselves is a series of books.

<sup>1040</sup> Rizvi, S. H., and al. (1999) *Religious circumcision: a Muslim view*. BJU Int, 83 (Suppl. 1), p. 13–16.

<sup>1041</sup> Abu-Sahlieh, S. A. A. (2012). *Circoncision masculine, féminine: débat religieux, médical, social et juridique*, p. 163.

<sup>1042</sup> IWHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data (2008) Male circumcision: global trends and determinants of prevalence, safety and acceptability, p. 3.

<sup>1043</sup> Luke 2: 21.

<sup>1044</sup> Slosar, J.P& D. O'Brien (2003). "*The Ethics of Neonatal Male Circumcision: A Catholic Perspective*". American Journal of Bioethics, 3 (2), p. 62–64.

IV. Concept of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia

Lebanon still practice circumcision but much more for cultural and prophylactic purposes than for religious reasons. Circumcision yielded up its place to baptism in order to foster the conversion of non-Jews to Christianity. Thus, the baptism that finds its roots in the Jewish “mikveh” represent a sign of a new birth and belonging to the Church.

Unit 1 will draw on a cup of Qiddush, “Shemirah”, Jewish circumcision set, Islamic circumcision costume, a baptism box, and a photograph of a Baptism ceremony in the cathedral of Tunis.



Cup of Qiddush for brit milah, North Africa, 19th century © Christophe Fouin, mahJ



“Shemirah” protective talisman for birth, Tunisia, 19th century, © Imprimerie Uzan père et fils



Jewish circumcision set, Mohal GUEZ, Kef, Tunisia, 20th century, © Chawki Dacharaoui, www.catawiki.fr



Circumcision costume, Islamic Jebba, Tunisia, 2019. © Hamdouni



Baptism box, Tunisia, 21st century, © Collection of Verbrunia Aras



Baptism of a young girl, cathedral of Tunis, 2017. © cathedrale Facebook page

## Unit 2: Religious Prescriptions and Practices for Conform Food

Most religions prescribe specific uses for food, mainly for spiritual reasons or dietetic theories. The rules of kashrut define the Jewish food prescriptions, which generically designate all laws relating to food. Deuteronomy and Leviticus indicate specific prohibitions and transmit specific rites that makes food conform to religion, which helps in another way to maintain group cohesion.<sup>1045</sup> Jews can eat shelled fish and farmed poultry and split hoof ruminants but cannot eat pork, rabbit, and horse. It is not possible to eat meats and dairy products together, because milk symbolizes life and blood symbolizes death.<sup>1046</sup> Jews should slaughter animals to suffer less but also to empty its blood since it symbolizes the soul.<sup>1047</sup> It is worth noting that hunted animals are inappropriate for food consumption. These practical modalities were at first in the form of oral testimonies that the rabbis transmitted to the Mishna and Talmud before being codified in the Code of Jewish Law *Choulhan Aroukh*.<sup>1048</sup>

Islam takes up part of the Judaism's prohibitions and mentions them in twenty-four verses of the Koran. It forbids Muslims to eat dead, stunned, or sacrificed animals to idols, ferocious beasts, blood, pork, and all animals slaughtered under the invocation of a name other than Allah. The novelty of the Qur'an results in its authorization of consuming camel, unlike Judaism. However, it is important to stress that it is possible to break this rule in case of food unavailability and danger of starving or a famine.<sup>1049</sup> In Islam, the term *Halâl* is in its religious meaning similar to the Jewish *kosher* and means permitted by religion, unlike *harâm* that designates the opposite. All sea products are *Halâl*, and animal products have to be slaughtered by a Muslim, Jew, or Christian. Christians maintained the prohibitions inherited from Judaism and reintroduced them in other forms. At first, they followed the Leviticus prohibitions that the apostles abolished afterward during the first council held in Jerusalem. Luther and Calvin claimed that it very difficult to set food rules from the New Testament, which increased the demise of prohibitions and sparsely affected Catholicism.<sup>1050</sup> It is important to note that the church that banned eating meat on Friday and during Lent ended by leaving the choice to the free appreciation of the believer.

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<sup>1045</sup> Leviticus 17: 1-14.

<sup>1046</sup> Deuteronomy 14:21.

<sup>1047</sup> Deuteronomy 12:23.

<sup>1048</sup> Da Silva, A. J. M. (2013). *Un ingrédient du discours*. Édilivre.p. 59-62.

<sup>1049</sup> Qur'an Surah Al Maidah 5: 3.

<sup>1050</sup> Prudhomme, C. (2016). *Interdits alimentaires, religions, convivialité*. Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses, (3), p. 124.

Unit 2 will draw on a kosher butcher's plate and a sheet of the Koran (Surah Al Maidah) that specifies the prohibitions and the practices for conform food.



### Unit 3: The Religious Majority and the Initiation into the Religious Community

At the age of thirteen, the Jewish boy reaches his religious majority, becomes a man capable of carrying a phylactery, and acquires the status of Bar Mitzvah. Tunisian Jews celebrate the religious majority and passage into the world of adult with a ceremony called *Tfellim*, in which the *hatan* receives a new costume and a new haircut. Carrying necessary prayer accessories such as *Talit* (prayer shawl), Kippah, Tefillin, and a prayer book, the *hatan* have to observe a collective office with his family and relatives. At the synagogue, he should read without the slightest interruption a verse from the Pentateuch called *Parashah* that he learned for months in a Hebrew school.<sup>1051</sup> In current Tunisia, the first cigarette offered by the maternal uncle to the *hatan* represents a manifestation of his access to the world of adults. It is important to underline that Jewish girls reach their religious majority at the age of twelve and receive a small celebration called “*Bat Mitzvah*”, in which the female gives a speech on a religious theme without reading the Torah. It is important to stress that in reform congregations, girls can also read the Torah, and their bat mitzvah started to be accepted in reform communities only during the 20th century.

In Islam, the religious majority extends from the age of seven to ten years, which is called period of “*taklif*”.<sup>1052</sup> Parents have to prepare their child whether male or female to become a responsible person who respects Islam’s rules of conduct and society’s moral values. According to the prophet’s hadith, parents have to softly educate their child to perform religious practices

<sup>1051</sup> Allali et al 2005, p 142.

<sup>1052</sup> Period of discernment, taking responsibility and socialization of the child

such as prayer and fasting at the age of 7 and to be more rigorous and severe at the age of 10 years.<sup>1053</sup> With puberty, the Muslim becomes spiritually adult and completely responsible of his/her behavior to God. The Koran obliges the pubescent to submit to society laws and politeness rules.<sup>1054</sup> Unlike Jews and Christians, Muslims do not celebrate childrens' religious majority, which often goes unnoticed. The Protestant confirmation represents a very widespread practice in the Reformed, Lutheran, and Methodist churches and aims to recall the baptism after the end of childhood religious education with the early adulthood.<sup>1055</sup> Catholics, who performed the confirmation two years after the first rite of initiation, celebrate it today during the adolescence between 12 to 18 years.<sup>1056</sup> It is important to emphasize that Orthodox consider the baptism as the only initiation sacrament, which includes baptismal anointing. Unit 3 will be on Tefillin, a bag of phylacteries, Islamic ablution stone, and three photographs to provide visitors with an insight into religious majority practice in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

 <p>Silk satin bag for Tefillin, Tunisia, 20th century, © mahJ</p>	 <p>Tefillin containing four biblical passages with leather straps, North Africa, 20th century. © mahJ</p>
 <p>Confirmation medal, France, 21st century. © collection of Verbrunia Aras</p>	 <p>Ablution stone for a major female with surah Al-Falaq, Tunisia, 2019. © collection of Mahmoud Nafati</p>

<sup>1053</sup> „Teach your children to pray when they are seven years old, and smack them (lightly) if they do not pray when they are 10 years old” Abu Dawood, saheeh by al-Albaani in al-Irwa’ (247). <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/2>

<sup>1054</sup> Surat al-Nour 24:59.

<sup>1055</sup> The ceremony is done at the age of 15. Gisel, P. (1995). *Encyclopédie du protestantisme*, Paris-Genève, Cerf-Labor et Fides, p. 258.

<sup>1056</sup> Ibid. p 259.



The bar mitzvah reciting the Torah, Tunis early 1950s. © Claude Sitbon



The religious majority with the cigarette offered by the uncle, Tunisia, 20th century, © Joseph et Marcelle Allali

#### Unit 4: The Religious Wedding

Jews, Muslims, and Christians frown upon celibacy to fulfil a religious and human duty of procreation. Catholicism values marriage as a superior cycle of life and has forbidden it to priests since the 12th century, unlike the Orthodoxy that obliges priests and deacons to be married. Protestants refuse monasticism that lacks biblical foundations and leave the choice to the individuals. Islam encourages marriage to procreate and deems it as one of prophet recommendations that Muslims should follow.<sup>1057</sup> Similarly, Judaism encourages procreation and expects from Jews to fulfil the commandment of having children.<sup>1058</sup>

Jewish marriage draws on highly codified ceremony and condition that should comply with religious rules and traditional values. The first irrevocable condition is that both spouses have to be Jews and if one of them belongs to another confession, they should convert. Jews cannot celebrate marriage on Shabbat (Saturday) or during religious holidays in the *Omer* period. The Tunisian Jewish ceremony is called *el Arch* (marriage) and begins with a primordial step called *shidoukh*, in which the bride and groom meet. A female, called *Khattaba*, in charge of matching young people, often organizes a meeting in the presence of both families.<sup>1059</sup> It is rare for families from two different regions to unite, however, if there is an agreement, an engagement should be prepared. The groom offers a ring to his bride around a family reception, and his mother offers her one of her jewels. The delegates of the rabbinical court draw up then a marriage contract *Ketoubbah* on a parchment. The wedding begins with a purification bath, *hammam*, followed by a Henna evening and a festive dinner in which the bride shows her dower

<sup>1057</sup> Qur'an, Surah Ar-raad 13:38

<sup>1058</sup> Genesis 1:28-31

<sup>1059</sup> Allali and al 2005, p. 144.

to the guests, which closely resembles Muslim marriage. During Hen's Saturday, the bride's family cooks a hen and sends it as an offering to the groom's family, which cuts it up in small portions and distributes it to the nearest family and friends.<sup>1060</sup> On the following Sunday or Wednesday, a nuptial blessing takes place at the synagogue, followed by seven blessings called *sheba berakhot*. The fish cutting ceremony represents a distinguishing feature of Tunisian Judaism, in which the spouse competes with his wife to cut a fish's head and tail. Women often win because of their sharper knives and use the fish tail as an amulet in their kitchen. At the end of the marriage, the newlyweds receive a period of seven days of relaxation, in which their family responds to all their need.

Muslim marriage also requires several religious rules and condition and begins with an engagement. The spouse should be Muslim, whereas the bride may have another confession. In 2019, Tunisia changed this law and enabled women to marry a non-Muslim person. Women receive a dowry and a donation *mahr* as a guarantee in case of divorce, death, or illness of her spouse. The marriage contract requires acceptance of both spouses in the presence of the bride's guardian, two major witnesses, and an imam or notary to consecrate the union. The Koran sets standards on marriage to protect women's rights and prohibit consanguineous relationships.<sup>1061</sup> The Quran authorizes marriage with several women only in case of equally supporting all of them and guaranteeing their rights after divorce.<sup>1062</sup> In Tunisia, Muslim weddings closely resemble the Jewish customs, it lasts one week and comprises the bride's trousseau preparation, purification bath (hammam), henna day, and traditional outfits feast (*outéya*). It ends with the day of *dokhla*, which is a common party that reunites both families and their relatives. In some regions, such as Sfax, the Jewish fish cutting ceremony morphed into a fish dancing in which the newlyweds help each other to jump over a fish to foster fecundity and happiness.

Catholics and orthodox consider marriage as a sacrament sign of God's love and commitment to his Covenant and require several meetings with a pastor or a priest to prepare it. Whatever the denomination of the church, the biblical foundations are the only reference that establishes the rights and duties of the spouses.<sup>1063</sup> For Catholics, the marriage sacraments have to take place in a church or chapel and requires a bishop's assistance. It begins with an opening celebration, vow exchange, prayers, oration, and ends with a nuptial blessing. The union loses its validity by the death of one of the spouses or in case of no real consent. Similarly, orthodox

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<sup>1060</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>1061</sup> Quran, Surah An-Nisa 4:23-24.

<sup>1062</sup> Quran, Surah An-Nisa, 20.

<sup>1063</sup> Monger, G. P. (2013). *Marriage Customs of the World: An Encyclopedia of Dating Customs and Wedding Traditions*, Vol. 1, Abc-clio, p. 153-154.

deem the marriage as a sacrament, often celebrate it combined with an engagement, and add a baptism to the ceremony. The priest reads the New Testament, and the bridegrooms walk holding a candle lit around the altar, pronounce their engagement, and then turn three times around the lectern. This union can dissolve only when a bishop pronounces the divorce. As opposed to this, Protestants deem marriage as a civil act and consider it facultative and advisable to go through a religious ceremony but not mandatory, since it adds a spiritual dimension to the union of marriage and places it under God's authority.<sup>1064</sup> In Tunisia, Protestant marriage occurs as follows: the pastor pronounces the blessing and reminds the spouses the founding values of their commitment, and gives them a Bible or a cross before the reception of congratulations.

Unit 4 will draw on a Marriage contract (Ketoubbah), Jewish towel for ritual bath, Catholic wedding medallion with a scene of blessing, a copper-crystal wedding Cross, a postcard of Tunis' Sheikhs who approved Muslims' marriages, and a "mahr" paid by a Muslim to his bride in 1980. A documentary of four minutes about religious marriage in the Abrahamic religions will provide visitors with an insight into commonality and unique areas of each tradition.



Marriage contract (Ketoubbah) between two Jews, Tunisia, September 1834, © RMN



Towel for the ritual bath of marriage, Tunisia, 20th century, © mahJ.



Catholic wedding medallion, 20th century, © collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Religious wedding cross made of crystal and copper, Tunisia 20th century. © collection of Giuseppe Peluso

<sup>1064</sup> Fahlbusch, E. & Bromiley, G. W. (2003). *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol 3, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, USA, p. 417-419.



Post card of Tunisian Sheikhs in a marriage bless, 20th century, ©Hamdouni



One dinar, Islamic Mahr, paid by the groom to the bride, Tunisia, 1980 © Collection of Zaara Daly

### Unit 5: Funeral Rites and Mourning Customs

Cremation was a predominant funeral practice and represented a sign of wealth in the past. Only slaves were thrown into mass graves without purification toilet. Religions with conviction of separation between the soul and the body and a final freedom such as Hinduism and Buddhism generally include cremation. Abrahamic religions give great respect to the deceased and dictate specific funeral rites. According to religion, traditions and funeral rites differ as each confession has its own prescriptions to help persons find peace and intercession. Jewish tradition strictly prohibits cremation and imposes a purification toilet for the deceased. A person from the same sex should perform the purification and read the psalms. This ritual is followed by an evening vigil for praying, in which the family receives the condolences. The oil lamp practice (quandil) whose flame should kept lit in honour of the deceased is widespread in Tunisia since it recalls the soul immortality.<sup>1065</sup> Interestingly, the colour white in mortuary convoys symbolizes the young age of the deceased. Burial ceremony usually takes place 24 hours after the death and includes a rabbi's presence to recite the Kaddish and perform the last prayer before the deceased's relatives throw three shovels of earth on the coffin. It is highly recommended to put Hebrew religious inscriptions on the funeral monument. Just as Muslims, Jews bury their deceased in the ground without a coffin and women should neither accompany the coffin nor attend the funeral. Jewish mourning lasts a whole year and includes three funeral orations called "drash" that take place 7 days, 30 days, and 1 year after the burial. This tradition closely resembles the Islamic mourning that lasts for three days for close relatives followed by a second funeral oration forty days after the funeral.

<sup>1065</sup> Allali et al 2005, p 147.

Islam implies a particular ceremonial in matters of funerals mentioned in the prophetic tradition and not in the Koran. Islamic tradition strictly prohibits cremation and imposes a purification toilet for the deceased. Four pious and purified people of the same sex of the deceased perform the ritual, wash up the body, and roll it up in a shroud (kafan). As in Judaism, while reciting prayers, Muslims bury their dead as quickly as possible and place the body in the ground no later than 48 hours after the death. During the funeral vigil, an imam recites the Koran in the presence of relatives and the family receive condolences. Without women and children, a convoy takes the deceased to a cemetery in a wooden coffin. Muslims bury the deceased in the ground placed on the right side with the chest turned toward Mecca. It is highly recommended to place a stele with a Qur'anic verse inscription to indicate the location of the burial and to prevent it from trampling. In Tunisia, the Fortieth day celebration remains a widespread practice and aims to ask God's forgiveness for dead persons by reciting the Quran, praying, and providing food to the poor. This ceremony closely resembles the orthodox homage tradition celebrated on the fortieth day of death, which ends the soul's ascent toward God.

Orthodox prefer burial to cremation so that the person is reborn at the time of Resurrection. Burials should take place three days after death to give the soul time to free of the body. After church ceremony and a priest's blessing, Orthodox bury the deceased facing the East in the direction of the Christ resurgence. Family and loved ones place a handful of soil on the coffin. Similarly, Catholics organize a mass before burial, in which they pay homage to the deceased through prayers, readings, and religious songs. A short ceremony accompanies the burial in which the priest blesses the deceased before burying it. It is important to stress that there are no particular restrictions in terms of funeral monument. Though Catholics traditionally choose burial, there is a trend for cremation after its authorization from the Vatican in 1963.<sup>1066</sup> The decline of religious practices, lack of space in cemeteries, and the expensive burials' concessions and maintenance explain the choice of cremation. Similarly, cremation is quite widespread among Protestants who organize a ceremony of handing over to God performed by a pastor in the church. Tunisia authorizes cremation through several funeral directors, Ramblot is the first company to offer this service.

Unit 5 will draw on a fragment of a Jewish funerary tomb from Sousse cemetery, Jewish burial shroud, a postcard of an Islamic burial scene, ritual-washing equipment for "*Ghosel*", Bronze

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<sup>1066</sup> *Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation*, retrieved on 24.03.2020 from [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20160815\\_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html).

mortuary ornament, and funeral accessory. The museography will not treat death in an allusive and indirect way but will create a sensitive and cognitive space, using a reflexive narration based on a comparison of funeral rites and mourning customs between religious communities in Tunisia.



Fragment of a funerary tomb, Jewish cemetery of Sousse, 21st century. © www.timesofisrael.com/



Jewish burial shroud (sarjeness) France, 20th century. © mahJ



Postcard of an Islamic burial scene, Tunisia, 20th century. © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



Ritual washing equipment for "Ghosel", 21st century. © www.pompes-funebres-musulmanes-du-var.com



Bronze mortuary ornament (Virgin Mary/ Dove) 21st century, France. © collection of Vebrunia Aras



Coffin corner, funeral accessory, 21st century, France. © collection of Vebrunia Aras

### **Unit 6: Major Stages of Religious Life (Immersive Room)**

Sounds tracks and video sequence are increasingly used in modern exhibition of religion. These effective tools morphed into mediation elements that energize a religious exposure. Through interactive display tools such as video projection equipment, short film (biographical), testimonies, 3D video mapping, and touch panels, the exhibition hall will provide visitors with an overview into major stages of life in the Abrahamic religions starting from the birth, circumcision, religious majority, marriage, death, and mooring.

#### **2.2.3. Message and Precepts of the Abrahamic Religions**

The third sequence of the second floor addresses the message and precepts of the Abrahamic religions and splits into two distinct parts: a main showroom composed of five units and a projection room used to provide visitors with an immersive experience (mapping, short films, and testimonies). Each unit will address a specific topic using different display tools such as religious objects, photographs, and engravings. This sequence sheds light on the concept of monotheism that claims the existence of a single transcendent and revealed god. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have a common history and share many common elements in particular in their messages and precepts. Even if the New Testament does not explicitly mention the concept of the holy trinity, god in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) represents the founding principle common to the main Christian denominations, which will be addressed in this sequence. The concept of a unique, powerful, creative, and merciful god was a progressive idea that began with Jewish monotheism and represented an exception compared to other polytheistic cultures. Believing in a single god expanded more quickly with the arrival of Christianity and Islam, which have set religious values, precepts rules, and traditions to fulfil God's commandment.<sup>1067</sup> Many religious texts and prophetic narrative share a common message of charity and advocate peace, tolerance, and protection of the most vulnerable. It is important to stress that these texts contain references that incite violence and even include direct injunctions for fighting. I will not discard addressing the bond between religious ideology and violence, even if some of these ideas are perceived as being of divine inspiration. A museum of religion should transmit social facts and religious behavior as it is without trying to improve religions' image.

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<sup>1067</sup> Gibert, P. (2010). *Le monothéisme est très difficile à penser*, in *Enquête sur le Dieu unique*, éd. Bayard/Le Monde de la Bible, p. 40-41.

### Unit 1: The Principles of Faith in the Abrahamic Religions

As an "administration of the sacred",<sup>1068</sup> religion claims the right to hold the exclusivity of the legitimate faith. Each religion has a deep conviction of providing the "true faith" through distinctive religious principles to enhance peoples' faith and conviction. Only adapting these principles can ensure a spiritual contact with the transcendence and enable individuals to feel the "real sacred".<sup>1069</sup> Abrahamic religions obey this rule even if they agree on some principles and oppose others. In Judaism, there are thirteen fundamental principles of faith called *Chlochah Assar Ikarim* that have been written by Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon and inspired from the Torah. The principles of Jewish belief are the belief in the Creator's existence, God's absolute and unparalleled unity, God's non-corporeality, God's eternity, God's omniscience and providence, primacy of the prophecy of Moses, divine origin and immutability of the Torah, divine reward and retribution, arrival of the Messiah and the messianic era, and resurrection of the dead. It also requires an imperative worship to God exclusively, who communicates with humans through prophecy.<sup>1070</sup>

The Christian faith draws on the Bible and its principles and is summed up in trusting God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It is very difficult to define accurately the Christian principles of faith since Christianity has diverse currents that only agrees in recognizing Jesus for providing salvation for all people through his life, death, and resurrection. Seeking God means learning his will, obeying him, and trusting his promises, and Jesus serves as a model in faith in God.<sup>1071</sup> Faithful gain the faith by listening and believing God's promises and proving good behavior in actions and confessions.<sup>1072</sup> This pillar closely resembles the Islamic concept of excellence in worship "Ihsen", which constitutes with the faith the two dimensions of Islam. The Islamic faith "Iman" breaks down into six articles called "arkan al-iman". It requires a belief in the existence and oneness of God (Allah), and the existence of angels, holy books, prophets, day of Judgment, and God's predestination, whether it involves good or bad.<sup>1073</sup> Professing the faith and believing in its articles represents one of indispensable ten qualities that help faithful receive God's mercy and reward.<sup>1074</sup> As mentioned in the Bible, faith grows through meditation (word of God) and acts worthy of faith. The Quran prompts the fact that

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<sup>1068</sup> Expression of Caillois, R. (1950). *L'homme et le sacré*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 200-256.

<sup>1069</sup> Bidar, A. (2013). *La foi au-delà de la religion, la foi après la religion*, centre d'études et de recherche sur le proche orient, p 15

<sup>1070</sup> Leibowitz, Y. (2007). *Les fondements du Judaïsme*, Patrimoines - Judaïsme, Les éditions du Cerf

<sup>1071</sup> Bernard, M. C. (2009). *Les fondamentaux de la foi chrétienne*, Presses de la Renaissance, p. 15-27

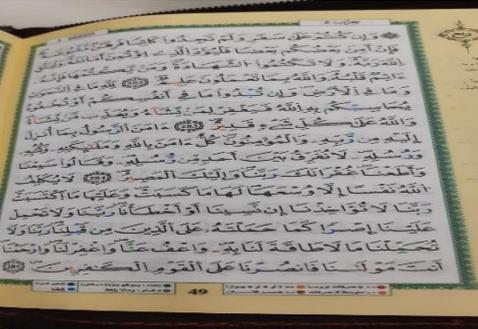
<sup>1072</sup> Mark 11 :23

<sup>1073</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:285

<sup>1074</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-Ahzab 33:35

faith grow with remembrance of god.<sup>1075</sup> According to the prophetic tradition, it is through the love with God and his prophet that faithful can be aware of the real meaning of faith.<sup>1076</sup>

Unit 1 will draw on a Mishneh Torah, a sheet Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans, a sheet of Koran that explains the principles of faith, and a Prophetic hadith about the “*Ihsen*”.

 <p>Code of Jewish law, Mishneh Torah, 14<sup>th</sup> century, © www.apmanuscripts.com</p>	 <p>God’s word as source of faith, Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans, 10:17 © www.temoinsdejesus.fr</p>
 <p>Islamic faith principles, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:285, © Hamdouni</p>	 <p>Prophetic hadith about Ihsen (Benevolence), sahih moslem, © www.pinterest.de</p>

**Unit 2: The Oneness of God in the Abrahamic Religion**

There is a continuity of divine oneness between Judaism (Shema Yisrael) and Christianity (creed) and Islam (Shahada).<sup>1077</sup> The core and essence of the oneness draws on a verse in the book of exodus: “*you shall have no other gods before me*”.<sup>1078</sup> Judaism has a unitary monotheistic conception that draws on gathering of all powers in a single eternal being:

<sup>1075</sup> Qur’an , Surah Al-Anfal 8:2

<sup>1076</sup> Muslim, Al-Jami‘ al-sahih, 40, no. 165.

<sup>1077</sup> Jomier, J. (2014). *Les fondements*, in Encyclopædia Universalis, p. 1156

<sup>1078</sup> Exodus: 20:3.

*YHWH*<sup>1079</sup> or *Elohim*.<sup>1080</sup> The Shema Israel fosters the principle of wholeness, uniqueness, and singularity: “Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”.<sup>1081</sup> Jewish tradition deems seven of God’s names sacred, which does not define him but refer rather to his different relationships with human beings. Jews consider God as an eternal non-physical and non-corporeal power, and all existences derive and depend on God Almighty.<sup>1082</sup> Jewish tradition stresses the fact that prayers should address God without any intermediary since it is heretical, if not prohibited, to address holy persons to intercede with God. Despite this proscription, several Tunisian Jews perform an annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Hai Taieb Lo Met at the Borgel cemetery and give donations and meals to the underprivileged. Believing in a divine oneness and banning any intermediation between Jews and God closely resembles the Islamic concept of “*tawhid*” that stresses believing in a unique and mighty god. In Islam, Allah refers to the creator as a powerful, lenient god and assigns him 99 attributes, called “*the most beautiful names of God*”. The *tawhid* represents the first pillar of Islam and it is done through a testimony called *chahada*. The profession of faith stresses the oneness of Allah and the acceptance of Mohamed as his messenger. Muslims should say: “*I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger*”.<sup>1083</sup>

It is important to stress that the Quran in Sura Al-Ikhlās is set against the Christian Trinity that defines God in three distinct entities. The Christian Trinity is set in turn against modalism, tritheism, ebionism, and Arianism. The Holy Trinity represents God in three entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are equal and have the same divine essence. The Father appears in the book of Exodus under the divine names Yahweh or Eloah and Jesus is his Son and Word.<sup>1084</sup> The Holy Spirit differs from the two tenets and is an intercessor and consoling divine breath and appears in the form of a dove, storm, and fire.<sup>1085</sup> Unlike Judaism and Islam which prohibit an intermediary that interfere between the faithful and God, Christianity deems Jesus as the only mediator between god and human beings. Christianity changed the aniconic position with the concept of incarnation and transformed the sacred representation into a connection between visible and invisible. Judaism forbids any form of divine representation and Islam bans making pictures to prevent competing with God.<sup>1086</sup> Several historians explain

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<sup>1079</sup> Exodus 20:6

<sup>1080</sup> Genesis 1: 1

<sup>1081</sup> Deuteronomy 6: 4.

<sup>1082</sup> Psalm 29

<sup>1083</sup> Jomier 2014, p. 1156-1157

<sup>1084</sup> John: 1

<sup>1085</sup> John: 14, 15, 16.

<sup>1086</sup> Exodus 20:4.

this restriction by a Jewish influence at the time of Muhammad in Mecca because of their wariness and opposition to divine representation.<sup>1087</sup>

Unit 2 will not contain divine representations to prevent offending religious sensibilities and will draw only on inscriptions of God's name, Islamic clock with the Kaaba, Jewish mirror, Torah cover, and print poster of Holy Spirit.



Islamic clock tower with the Kaaba and the 99 names of Allah. © propriety of Mahmoud Nafati



Oval bevelled mirror with Hebrew inscription Shaddai (name of god) North Africa, around 1900. © mahJ



Holy Spirit Print Poster, Spiritual Wall décor, © Marina Petro Studio [www.pinterest.de](http://www.pinterest.de)



Torah cover with the inscription Godesh/IH (saint for God), North Africa, 20th century. © mahJ

### Unit 3: The Prayer as a Fundamental Act of Faith

Prayer represents a major practice of grace, meditation, communion with God, and an expression of faith in his words. It has many forms that varies between prayers of intercession, confession, worship, and gratitude. There are also collective and individual prayers that depend on the occasion. In Judaism, *tefillah* (prayer) is a Torah-based commandment,<sup>1088</sup> which is mandatory three times a day for Jewish men and once a day for women. Jewish law (halakha)

<sup>1087</sup> M. Chebel (2016, January) *La querelle des image et l'islam*, Revue des Deux Monde, journal article p. 24-31

<sup>1088</sup> Deuteronomy 11:13

prescribes three prayer services per day: *sha'harit* (Morning prayers) *Mincha* (afternoon prayers), and *Maariv* (evening prayers), to which is added two additional offices: *moussaf* during Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, and *ne'ila* during Yom Kippur.<sup>1089</sup> For praying, Jews recite praises, professions, while standing or seated, and should turn physically and spiritually to Jerusalem temple. Jews do not pray prostrated on their knees and wear a *kippa* and *talit* to express respect for God. Collective prayers gather at least ten persons and start with a blessing before reading a passage from the Torah.

In Christianity, prayer is a fundamental act of faith that shapes faithful weapon and breath and is the first means of communication with the creator. The exchange with God can be performed individually or collectively, in a church or elsewhere, and takes different forms according to religious currents. Our Father prayer is a common practice for all Christians since Jesus taught it to his first disciples and has its origin in the Gospels.<sup>1090</sup> Christian prayer consists of two inseparable and complementary components: prayer life at the Church and a personal one in private spaces. Religious currents, social backgrounds, and cultures greatly influence the ways of praying, liturgical gestures, and used objects. It is very common to make use of worship objects such as crucifixes and rosaries during prayer or to perform liturgical gesture as prostration, genuflection, or hand tracing the sign of the cross. Catholic and Orthodox address their prayer to the Father, the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, and to the Virgin Mary in cases of intercessory prayers.<sup>1091</sup> Protestant and evangelical prayers draws uniquely on the Bible and address exclusively God in the name of Jesus. It is worth noting that the Liturgy of the Hours represents for Catholic and Orthodox practitioners a compulsory daily prayer repeated seven times a day, which forms a common ground with Muslim prayer "*Salat*". In the Quran, the purpose of the creation of humans is worshipping God and obeying his will through five commandments, of which the "*Salat*" forms the pivot of communion with the creator.<sup>1092</sup> "*Salat*" is an essential characteristic of the believer, apogee of his spiritual life, and the highest form of worship that brings him closer to God and purifies him from his sins.<sup>1093</sup>

There are two forms of prayers: obligatory five canonical prayers at dawn, in the middle of the day, in the middle of the afternoon, at sunset, and at dusk and non-mandatory supererogatory prayers, linked to different situations in everyday life.<sup>1094</sup> It is not advisable to perform a

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<sup>1089</sup> Steinsaltz, A. (2012) *Koren Talmud Bavli*, vol.1: Berakhot: Standard, Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation. p. 176

<sup>1090</sup> Matthew 6: 9-13 / Luke 11: 2-4

<sup>1091</sup> Feumetio, B., & Odimba, A. B. (2009). *Un Certain chemin de vie*. Editions Publibook, p. 239.

<sup>1092</sup> Qur'an, Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56

<sup>1093</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:45 / Surah Fatir 35:29

<sup>1094</sup> Ballanfat, P. (2007). *Prière canonique*, in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (Dir.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris, Laffont, coll. Bouquins, p. 690-691

supererogatory prayer during the day to avoid any resemblance to sun worshiping religions. The daily ritualistic prayers are compulsory for men, women, and children after the age of maturity and differs from the religious supplication “dua”. Each prayer includes two, three, or four units (rak'a), which begins with the recitation of Surah Al-Fatiha and other Surah, followed by invocations and several postures going from standing, tilted, prostrate, until kneeling. Unit 3 will draw on a Sidour Prayer book, handheld book of Quran, ceramic dish with prayer, and three photographs of Tunisians of different confessions praying. A documentary of four minutes will enhance unit 3 with an overview into the stages of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic prayers and their specificity in Tunisia.



Siddur Prayer Book for Shabbat, Djerba, Tunisia, 1962. © Hamdouni



Prayer ritual of a Tunisian Jew, synagogue of Boujaafar. © Walid Mejri www.inkyfada.com



Decorative ceramic dish with the prayer Our Father in Arabic calligraphy, © www.pinterest.co.uk



Handheld small book of Quran with closure, Tunisia, 2019. © Hamdouni

#### Unit 4: The Almsgiving as a Religious Duty, Social Action and Philanthropic Act.

In many religions, almsgiving represents an offering to God that aims to purify and free oneself from sin, compensate for bad deeds, and spread justice in society. In Buddhism, alms differ and does not mean a charity but rather a respect and spirituality to start a journey to Nirvana. Even if its name, tradition, and moment vary, charity and alms giving for neighbours and the poor are of paramount importance in the Abrahamic religion to strengthen social justice. It is true

that charity carries humanization and purification but represents at the same time a religious obligation that aims to share material wealth and achieve distributive justice. Almsgiving, called also "*Tzedakah*", is a central and essential element in Jewish tradition and holds a central place in Jewish liturgy. This philanthropic act toward one's neighbour is not a personal choice but rather an obligation that aims to achieve justice and justness between the faithful. According to a codified command (*mitzvah*) mentioned several times in the Torah, Jews have to perform charity without exception.<sup>1095</sup> Jews practice the *Tzedakah* on their sacred days such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kipur, which forms with the repentance (*teshuva*) and prayer (*tefilah*) the best three ways of gaining forgiveness and mercy. In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides fixed in a descending order the eight degrees of almsgiving act, which goes from offering a job (optimal) to a donation against the will (minimal). Maimonides's hierarchy stress the importance of donors' anonymity and preservation of beneficiaries' dignity by almsgiving, which recall the third pillar of Islam "*zakat*" that stresses this requirement too.

In Islam, *Zakat* is an obligatory alms and a commandment of financial order that purifies the soul, increases merits, cleanses from sin, and reduces greed, hatred, and resentment. The Quran stresses the importance of praying and paying *Zakat* to fulfill Allah's commandment.<sup>1096</sup> It also stresses that almsgiving is not a voluntarily contribution offered by a rich to a poor, but a right due to a deprived person on rich's goods.<sup>1097</sup> There are four types of goods in annual zakat: fortune (money), crops, goodwill, and livestock.<sup>1098</sup> There is another form of almsgiving called *Zakat al-Fitr*, which is paid in the form of food at the end of Ramadan in order to clean the sins committed during the holy month. In Tunisia, this practice is widespread in the form of money, which the State fixed in 2019 with one and half dinars (half euro). Similarly, almsgiving is not an optional practice in Christianity but rather an act of beneficence toward the poor and vulnerable needed to fulfil God's requirement and expand mercy and social justice. It is the first pillar of justice that Jesus stressed in the Sermon on the Mount, which should be done in discretion to ensure its purity and reward.<sup>1099</sup> Jesus clearly values the importance of helping one's neighbour, giving generously, and lending without hope of return.<sup>1100</sup> Apart from its purifying dimension, almsgiving without abundance or superfluous will be rewarded with an inexhaustible treasure from God. There is no particular rule that specifies the amount and form

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<sup>1095</sup> Deuteronomy 15.11, Leviticus 25.35, Leviticus 25.36

<sup>1096</sup> Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:43

<sup>1097</sup> Qur'an, Surah At-Tawbah 9:103

<sup>1098</sup> It is compulsory (2.5% of the annual saved amount) if a person's wealth reaches the tax threshold, which is 85 grams of gold.

<sup>1099</sup> Matthew 6

<sup>1100</sup> Luke 6:38

of alms; however, it should obey some primordial principle: Christians should pay alms with measure and reflection from their own goods in a useful time and try to seek social justice before charity. The exception in Christianity remains that part of the alms may be public and named if the person is in abundance in order to set an example for others and follow Jesus's recommendation: *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"*.<sup>1101</sup> It is important to note that several charitable associations of religious communities and civil society such as Tunespoir or Association badr do a great job in collecting donations and helping disadvantaged people

Unit 4 will be drawn on three alms trunks and a copper grain measure used during zakat el Fiter.

 <p>Wooden alms trunk with inscriptions in French and Hebrew, North Africa, 20th century. © mahJ</p>	 <p>Sadaka donation trunk for mosques and charities, North Africa, 21st century. © www.gramho.com</p>
 <p>Wooden church trunk for donations, 20th century, France. © www.holyart.fr</p>	 <p>Copper grain measure for alms "Saa", Tunisia, 20th century, collection of Mahmoud Naffati</p>

### Unit 5: Pilgrimage and Incubation in the Abrahamic Religion

The pilgrimage is a human quest for sacredness and a religious achievement that aims to strengthen the pilgrims' faith. This religious act requires a journey as well as a physical and mental break with everyday life to renew spirituality in sacred places. The practice was

<sup>1101</sup> Matthew 5:16

widespread in ancient religions despite the fact that pilgrims had to travel long distances on foot. One of the oldest pilgrimage sites still in existence is the megalithic Stonehenge in England, which dates back to the 3rd century BC. Pilgrimages form an essential element in most of world's religious traditions, in which the pilgrims try to establish a direct communication with the divine through an interference of holy persons, relics, and temples. It represents in the Abrahamic religions a powerful religious and spiritual manifestation that triggers a huge socialization and a codified spatial and ritual scenography that differs from confessions to another.<sup>1102</sup> It is important to stress that pilgrimage by proxy that faithful perform instead of dead people or physically or mentally incapable persons is very common in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as incubation and divination. Incubation is a religious rite similar to the pilgrimage that dates back to ancient Greece and Rome and draws on divination in dreams.<sup>1103</sup> It seeks answers to problems, divine help to make the right choice, and even to predict the future through a revelation dream. While meditating or sleeping near a sacred tomb, temple, well, cave, or a tree, many faithful hope through therapeutic incubation to heal from limping, sterility, and paralysis. This practice is very widespread among Hebrews who perform it in Gibeon to commemorate the appearance of God to Salomon in dreams.<sup>1104</sup>

According to the Torah, the Israelites should perform three Pilgrimages in Jerusalem, which take place during the Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.<sup>1105</sup> This worship known as *Shalosh Regalim* that required a journey to Jerusalem to perform it lost value after the destruction of the second temple and it is nowadays performed in front of the Wailing Wall. However, over time, other places of pilgrimage such as Judea and Samaria emerged and other forms of devotion for Rabbi appeared such as that of Rebbi Hai Taieb Lomet in Tunisia. More importantly, thousands of Jews annually come to Tunisia on the 33rd day of Omer to attend the Ghriba and commemorate Rabbi Meïr Baal HaNess and Rabbi Shem'un. The worship consists of visiting the synagogue, performing prayer, reading Siddur Sefer, giving alms, and ends up with assisting in one of the two Torah processions that celebrates the union between the people of Israel and God. This pilgrimage represents the only occasion with no separation between men and women inside the synagogue. Apart from lighting the candles, various women lay eggs on a vault in the synagogue with their names or those of single women written on them. They should eat them at the end of the feast to ensure finding a husband and fecundity. Three decades ago, Tunisian Jews performed other pilgrimages for the tomb of Rabbi Yacoub Slama in Nabeul or

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<sup>1102</sup> Dupront, A. (1987). *Du sacré: croisades et pèlerinages, images et langages*. Gallimard, p. 389-390.

<sup>1103</sup> Renberg, G. H. (2017) *Where Dreams May Come: Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World*, Brill.

<sup>1104</sup> The episode of Salomon's dream is cited in the The Book of Kings (ninth book of the Hebrew Bible).

<sup>1105</sup> Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:16

that of Rabbi Fraji Chaouat in Testour. It is important to note that the pilgrimage of Yossef El Maarabide in *Hamma* lost value and disappeared after the transportation of his tomb to Sarcelles in Paris, which consequently changed the place of pilgrimage to France and made *Hamma* lose its spiritual value.<sup>1106</sup> These forms of devotion called incubation are not typical Jewish practice, on the contrary it is also widespread among Muslims and in some Christian sects, particularly in the Mediterranean region. Many pilgrims spend nights near holy places to increase their faith or perform a cure or receive a divine dream.<sup>1107</sup>

Experiencing divine night visions through incubation was not a widespread practice among Christians, who practiced spiritual retreat, penitential and healing pilgrimage due to their importance in popular imaginary.<sup>1108</sup> Penitential pilgrimages began in the 3rd century and sought to commemorate the passion for Christ in places mentioned in the Old Testament or Gospels such as the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Pilgrims who were mainly male, solitary, in pairs, or in small groups aimed through this practice to strengthen their faith and acquire repentance. In the Middle Ages, pilgrimages declined due to the road insecurities in times of wars and decreased in value because of the emergence of spiritual and interior pilgrimage with the reform of the movement of Modern Devotion.<sup>1109</sup> The enlightenment philosophy exacerbated the decline of pilgrimage and spoke against religious enclosure and trade of relics. This situation did not last long since the reopening of the Jerusalem pilgrimage in the 19th century triggered a religious revival and gave a considerable rise to religious and healing journeys. Along with this effervescence, regional pilgrimage and spiritual retreats became widespread throughout Europe and new saints and relics emerged.<sup>1110</sup> Catholics mainly go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Fátima, or Santiago de Compostela. It is important to stress that these pilgrimages boomed in the 21st century and that large parts of them are Marian such as those performed in Portugal, France, and Mexico. Orthodox go less on pilgrimage despite the large number of sacred places such as the Holy Land, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and the saint Serge of Radonezh in Russia. In Tunisia, a regional Marian pilgrimage takes place each August in the church of Saint-Augustin and Saint-Fidèle in la Goulette. It celebrates the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary through a solemn mass and a procession of the Madona Di Trapani. This tradition launched by Capuchin friars for the Sicilian community at the end of the

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<sup>1106</sup>Podselver, L. (2001). *Le pèlerinage tunisien de Sarcelles. De la tradition à l'hédonisme contemporain*. Socio-anthropologie, (10), p. 1-3.

<sup>1107</sup> Kingsley, P. (1999). *In the Dark Places of Wisdom Golden Sufi Center*. Inverness, California, p. 1-172.

<sup>1108</sup> Rhead, J. C. (2002). *The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries Into Modern Medicine*. Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, p. 22-41

<sup>1109</sup> Vincent, C. (2004). *Identités pèlerines*, Université de Rouen. Groupe de recherches d'histoire, Havre, p. 232.

<sup>1110</sup> Dominique, J. (1980). *Pèlerins et pèlerinages dans l'Europe moderne*, École Française de Rome, p. 125.

19th century was a significant event for the Christian community of Tunis. After 53 years of absence, it got the support of the authorities in 2017, reappeared in the street of Tunis, and attracted several hundred pilgrims and even Tunisian Muslims.

In Islam, pilgrimage helps master the soul and acquire expiation of all these sins apart that disobey God. It draws on two categories: Hajj (great worship) that represents one of the main pillars of Islam and takes place during the lunar month of Dhû al-hijja, and Umrah (small worship), which occur at any period of the year. Pilgrims perform these worships in Mecca and Medina, which made from Saudi Arabia the soil of Islam at the beginning of the 7th century. According to Islamic tradition, Abraham and his son Ishmael built the Kaaba, which make from it the fundamental centre of this worship. Hajj represents an obligatory worship that every Muslim should perform at least once in a life in case of financial and physical ability; contrary to Umrah that does not have a mandatory aspect.<sup>1111</sup> Hajj dates back to the year 631 since it emerged after a prophetic revelation that incited every Muslims to go on pilgrimage.<sup>1112</sup> One year later, the prophet responded to God's will, went on Hajj, and performed a coherent ritual that morphed into a codified ritual followed by all pilgrims later on. Hajj does not have a specific ritual mentioned in the Quran, which means that the prophet reused practices from pre-Islamic heritage as circumambulation and hills' travel and reused them to build the sequence of Islamic pilgrimage. Hajj's pillars are six: intention of entering into ritual, day of Arafah, towers around the Kaabah, travel between the two hills, and respect for pillars order.

It is important to note that Muslim pilgrims reached mecca on foot or in camel caravans in the Middle Ages, have often met Christian pilgrims on pilgrimage routes, and had sometimes stayed in the same accommodations.<sup>1113</sup> More significantly, Muslims also practiced incubation close to sacred places for therapeutic reasons, inspiration, and guidance in terms of business decision-making or marriage choice. Islam is a large night dream culture full of divinatory knowledge, mediation, and interpretation. In Tunisia, Muslims still practice incubation to receive vision, mediation, and therapeutic cure through small local pilgrimages called "zerda" that are dedicated to marabouts such as Sidi Mansour, Sidi Salem, Sidi Maâouia, Sidi Labiédh, Sidi Abderrahmane, or Sidi Mohamed Chérif.<sup>1114</sup> Yearly, thousands of Tunisians visit marabouts, light candles, make sacrifices in order to grant a wish (success, pregnancy), get a cure, or receive a divine vision. However, it is important to recall that Islam prohibits an intermediary with God

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<sup>1111</sup> Qur'an , Surah Ali 'Imran 3:97.

<sup>1112</sup> Qur'an , Surah At-Tawbah [9: 3] mentions this obligation.

<sup>1113</sup> Chaïb, Y. (2000). *Le mahmal et la caravane égyptienne des pèlerins de La Mecque, XIIIe-XXe siècles*, Edisud, p. 37-40.

<sup>1114</sup> Kilani, M. (1992). *La construction de la mémoire: Le lignage et la sainteté dans l'oasis d'El Ksar*, p. 212-217.

as well as worship dedicated to holy persons, which gave place to a consultation Prayer called “*Salat al Istikhara*” instead of incubation.

Unit 5 will draw on Jewish vows eggs, a Torah crown, Siddur Sefer Minha, a print of Jacob’s Dream, Christian rosary, veil, male and female Tunic for Hajj, Candles, incense, and a photograph. A documentary of four minutes will provide the visitors with an insight into the different stage of the procession of the Madonna of Trapani in la Goulette and the Jewish pilgrimage of Djerba.



Vows eggs, pilgrimage of el Ghriba, 2017. © Frédérique Harrus, [www.francetvinfo.fr](http://www.francetvinfo.fr).



Torah crown used during pilgrimage procession, Nord Africa, 1896, © Gilles Berizzi/ mahJ



Siddur Sefer Minha veArvit, Maklouf Nadjar, Sousse, Tunisia, 1926, © [www.ma-shops.com](http://www.ma-shops.com)



Print, Jacob’s Dream, France, 1850. © collection of Laurence Roux



Rosary, religious garment, Jerusalem pilgrimage, 2015. © Collection of Verbrunia Aras.



Christian veil, Jerusalem pilgrimage, 2015. © collection of Verbrunia Aras.

 <p>Male tunic for Hajj, Tunisia, 2019. © Hamdouni</p>	 <p>Male tunic for Hajj, Tunisia, 2019. © Hamdouni</p>
 <p>Incubation place near the tomb of Sidi Maaouia, Cap bon, 21st century, © Hamdouni</p>	 <p>Candles and incense used in the zarda<sup>1115</sup> of Sidi Maaouia, Cap bon, 21st century, © Hamdouni</p>

### 2.3. Third floor: Water as a Common Founding Element for the Abrahamic Religions

Water is a precious element that does not cover all the needs of the human being because it unceasingly oscillates between plethora and lack. Water sanctity explains society's fight against the depletion of water resources and its attempts to create a new relationship with nature and the life-giving element. Water is an essential element in human life since it nourishes, purifies, blesses, awakens life, and legitimizes social hierarchies. It is the departure point from which humans, society, and religion began. This spiritual substance forms an intrinsic part of creation and development of religions and constitutes a medium that transforms different aspects of humanity into a coherent unit. Water's physical character morphed into a historical and religious agent and created a continuum between the past, present, and future.<sup>1116</sup> Eliade stressed the intervention of the senses in shaping religion and perceiving spiritual experience. S. B. Plate who claims that learning and understanding religion have to come to individuals' senses to get inside sensational experiences and connect thoughts with feelings.<sup>1117</sup> This sensual engagement

<sup>1115</sup> Is a form of worship of saints in Tunisia (visiting their tombs), especially in the countryside.

<sup>1116</sup> Tvedt, T. (2002). *Worldviews and Self-images*. A Humanitarian Superpower's Intellectual History, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 166-168.

<sup>1117</sup> Plate, S. B. (2014). *A History of Religion in 51/2 Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to Its Senses*. Beacon Press, p 5.

could lead to a renewed stance on dialogue between religions and revisited interpretation of meaning. Water is a sensorial substance that can be heard, tasted, seen, touched and felt, and most importantly can build bonds and connections between humans and between the sacred and profane. For this reason, I have chosen it to build the core of the third floor because of its religious and imaginary dimension, which is not a secondary aspect of human thought but its basic matrix and key element that expedited its worship as an element of passage. Water actively intervenes in the unfolding of the narrative as a dividing line that separates the pure from the impure. It connects the corporeal with the spiritual sand, awakening the consciousness to reach the highest and most spiritualized thinking.

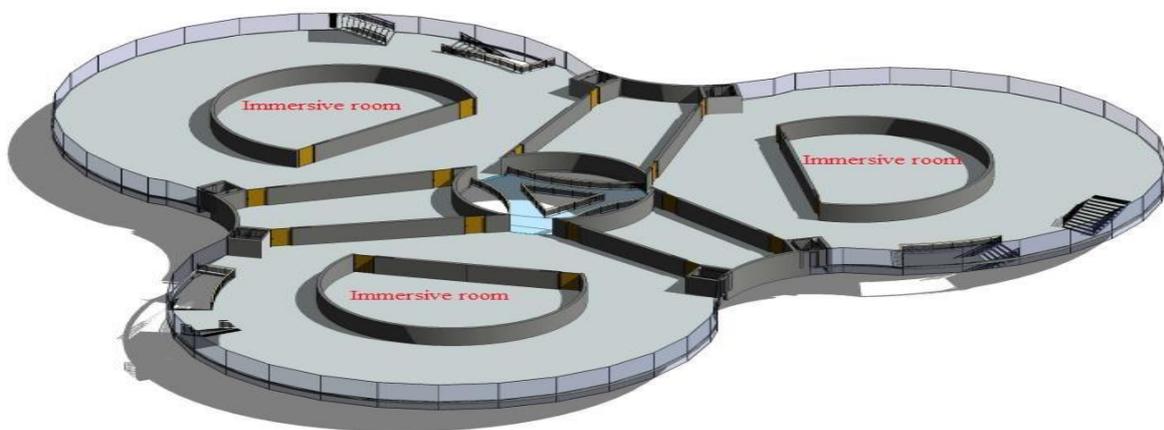


Figure 51 The thematic repartition of the third floor. ©Hamdouni

Unlike the first floor that provided different sounds and was acoustically separate between the envelopes, I suggest creating a personalized acoustic atmosphere for the whole floor to stress the crossing and sharing aspects of religions and add a special touch to the scenography. Since soundscapes draw often on distinguishable voices or sound, I suggest producing mixed soundbites of people praying in Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin and rend it indistinguishable to shape a feeling of prayer rather than to present a prayer itself. This soundscape will create a mystic atmosphere, engage visitors, and awake their curiosity in trying to distinguish the language, which reserves them from boredom. It is very important to provide an acoustic comfort on this floor and not to exceed a sound pressure level of 28-35 designed for museums. The colour of envelope will be light blue in reference to the core theme of the floor (water).

The Abrahamic religions emerged in the Middle East, which is a desert area in which water represents a valuable element, key to survival, and a divine gift. Rivers have served as a

symbolic spiritual frontier that separated pagans from Hebrews on the other side, and as a place of inspiration favourable to revelations such as for Ezekiel with the Chebar River, for Daniel with the Oulai River, or with the Tigris.<sup>1118</sup> Water has a plural character (above/below),<sup>1119</sup> transformative character given its hydrological cycle, and a contradictory character (life/death).<sup>1120</sup> It symbolizes God's power that gives life and takes it again as part of a process of creation and transformation that may also turn to its opposite and trigger destruction. It is true that water is a sign of divine mercy; it has however, a destructive and purifying nature that could turn very violent and be harmful. The deluge, mentioned in a relatively similar way in the Abrahamic religions, gives an accurate idea of water's destructive aspect that ended a humanity to pave the way for the regeneration of another one and enabled the re-creation of a new world.

### Unit 1: Water as an Element of Creation and Destruction

By divine will, the vital and beneficent nature of water might turn into its opposite and morph into destructive waters. Therefore, the deluge paradoxically bears in it a positive value of water because even if God threatened, he also promised to save humanity and regenerate life. Although the flood had a destructive character, it had also a purifying character that contributed in restarting and renewing the world. This logically explains that disaster as an ideal way to tame fear in order to consider survival still inhabits the human imagination.<sup>1121</sup> In religious texts, water appears to be an adversary of sin and wickedness since it destroys to rebuild a better humanity. In the Bible, wickedness, violence, depravity, and barbarity of the human being triggered God's decision and wrath to launch a flood, however, the Quran explains it by peoples' disobedience and rejection of monotheism.<sup>1122</sup> The construction and structure of the ark are very detailed in the book of Genesis, contrary to the Quran that gives a very brief description.<sup>1123</sup> The Quran evokes eight times the word "*fulk*" as an ordinary boat built with planks nailed with tows and not an ark as described in Jewish tradition.<sup>1124</sup> In iconographic tradition, Noah is often associated with various attributes: an Ark surrounded with exotic and domestic animals, birds in flight or at rest or sailing on rough seas. The Quran mentioned Noah several times and devoted him a Surah "*Nuh*".<sup>1125</sup> Indeed, he is one of the most evoked prophets

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<sup>1118</sup> Joshua 24:14; Chapters 1, 3, 10; Chapter 8; Chapters 10, 12.

<sup>1119</sup> Genesis, 1, 7.

<sup>1120</sup> Genesis 6:17 / Koran Hud: 11, 42.

<sup>1121</sup> Durand, G. (1993). *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Dunod; Édition: 11e édition.

<sup>1122</sup> The book of Genesis 6, 5-6; Surah Nuh 71, 21.

<sup>1123</sup> The book of Genesis 6, 14-16; Qur'an, 11, 37.

<sup>1124</sup> Gloton, M. (2019). *Une approche du Coran par la grammaire et le lexique*, Albouraq, p. 379

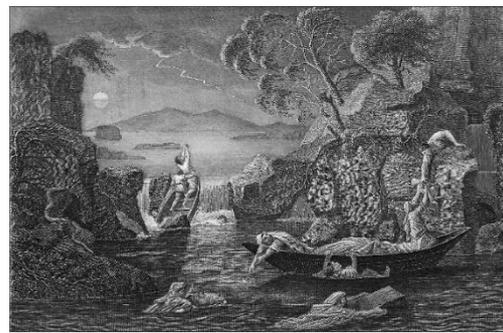
<sup>1125</sup> Qur'an, Surah Nuh 71

in written Arabic tradition and most represented figure in Islamic illustration and art works. Many Tunisian artists illustrated the flood through various paintings under glass, miniatures, and manuscript paintings, which raises many questions relating to the status of image and prohibition of figurative representation in the Arab-Muslim civilization and the aesthetic choices of such illustration. Many Tunisian artists such as Othman Khadhraoui and Ahmed El Hajeri gathered information and details from different religious texts and illustrated the story of Noah in a talented artistic manner. The painting under glass represents one of the most used artistic media in Tunisia to address hagiographic and heroic themes and to reflect religion preponderance in the daily life of Tunisian society.<sup>1126</sup> These artifacts that put great emphasis on Noah launched the process of acculturation to iconic and aesthetic modernity in urban areas and boosted the pictorial representation of the human person in the popular milieu.

Unit 1 will draw on a painting under glass, a copper engraving, chapter six of the book of Genesis in Arabic, and the surah of Nuh to go into the details of the scene of the flood. Juxtaposing the Arabic Bible and Quran aims to show visitors the similarities between the religious texts and overcome religious and linguistic barriers. Tunisian visitors are accustomed neither to seeing an Arabic Bible nor to experiencing a juxtaposition of artifacts with sheets of religious books. This new museographic technique has proven to be very effective with Tunisian visitors during the exhibit “*Shared Holy Places*” and contributed in enhancing the perceived value of visitors and did not create a disturbance in terms of religious sensibilities. Juxtaposing objects shows newness and originality with respect to the classical museological register in Tunisian religious exposures and collections.

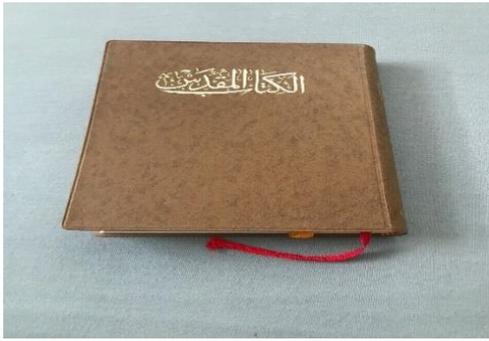


Painting under glass, Noah's Ark, Tunisia, 19th century. © www.gric-international.org



Copper engraving, biblical scene of the flood, 19th century, © Avignon library, France. © Hamdouni

<sup>1126</sup> Masmoudi, M. (1972). *La peinture sous-verre en Tunisie*, Editions Cérés Production, Tunis, p 21.



Arabic Van dyck Bible, Tunisia, 2009, © collection of Jeanette Issaoui



Surah Nuh 71 (Noah), Koran, Tunisia, 2018m ©Hamdouni

### Unit 2 Water as a Protective Element

According to the Book of Exodus, the Pharaoh commanded to kill all Hebrew male newborns to avoid having enemies for Egypt later on.<sup>1127</sup> Moses's mother Jochebed hid her child, put him in a basket, and dropped it in a river. Water protected Moses and brought him to the daughter of the King Bithia, who saw him near the shore. She adopted him and raised him in her father's court. Moses's story closely resembles to that of Noah since water miraculously saved both of them by triggering survival and disappearance. The redemption of believers opposed to the vanity of unbelievers ended up victors of persons of faith due to the power of water. Indeed, it may be a source of life and purity but can trigger an opposite action. In the Quran and biblical text, the sea blocking the passage of Israelites who fled the Egyptian army opened miraculously to let them pass and closed on their pursuers.<sup>1128</sup> The water of the Red Sea saved approximately two million Israelites, engulfed the Egyptian cavalry, and pushed the infantry to retreat.<sup>1129</sup>

Crossing deserts implies experiencing thirst because water is either bitter or non-existent. Forty years after their diaspora from Egypt, the Israelites found themselves threatened by thirst and hunger in Kadesh and blamed Moses for their precarious situation. Under God's command, Moses struck a rock twice with his staff and an abundance of water emerged for his people and their livestock.<sup>1130</sup> Unlike the figure of Noah and his ark, Tunisian plastic art turned its back on the figure of Moses and his desert crossing despite their presence in the Quran. This avoidance guarded against igniting Jewish religious sensitivities, triggering a political controversy, and

<sup>1127</sup> The Book of Exodus 1:10

<sup>1128</sup> The Book of Exodus, Chapter 14, 19; Surah Al-'Ankabut 29, 15.

<sup>1129</sup> Aron, R. (2016, November) *le passage de la mer rouge*, Revue Des Deux Mondes, p. 205-206,

<sup>1130</sup> The Book of Exodus, chapter 17, 6.

offending the moralism of Islam scholars who saw it as the figuration of prophets and a frivolous activity.<sup>1131</sup> Unit 2 will draw on three engravings of biblical scenes and a copper wall décor of the exodus of Moses. Unit 2 will also include a video of three testimonies of a priest, imam, and rabbi about water as a protective element in religion.



Engraving, Moses in the Nile, 18-century, Avignon library, France. © picture Hamdouni



Copper wall décor, the Exodus of Moses, France, 20th century. © collection of Laurence Roux



Engraving, crossing the Red Sea, Exodus chapter 14, Avignon library, France. © picture Hamdouni



Engraving, Water From the Rock, Exodus chapter 17, Avignon library, France. © picture Hamdouni

### Unit 3: Water as a Key Element of Love and Passion (Rebecca and Isaac)

Springs and groundwater wells are of paramount importance to human life, as they trigger life, fertility, joy, celebration, and love. This life-giving substance has a particular relationship with women, as givers of life, because of their constant contact and daily acts drawing on water such as transporting or washing. For instance, the story of Isaac and Rebecca took shape near a well after Abraham sent his faithful servant Eliezer to Aram to find a bride for his son Isaac. Eliezer asks God for help choosing the right woman for Isaac and God told him that the promise of Isaac would offer him and his ten camels water. When Eliezer arrived near a fountain, where many girls were drawing water, none of them paid any attention to him expect Rebecca, who

<sup>1131</sup> Masmoudi 1972, p 22.

offered him water.<sup>1132</sup> Isaac loved and married Rebecca, who gave him 20 years later two sons, Esau and Jacob.<sup>1133</sup> Like Isaac and Jacob, Moses meets his future wife Zipporah near a well after he defended her from shepherds, drew water for her, and watered her flock. Zipporah told her Reuel what happened with Moses, so he invited him in and gave him his daughter as wife.<sup>1134</sup>

Unit 3 will draw on an engraving and an art print of the meeting of Rebecca with Eliezer and then with Isaac. Using engraving and print aims to bridge the gap of non-existence of Tunisian artworks dealing with these biblical scenes.



Steel engraving, biblical scene, Eliezer et Rebecca, 19th century, Avignon library, France. © Hamdouni



Art print, biblical scene, the meeting of Isaac and Rebecca, France. © collection of Laurence Roux

#### Unit 4: Water as a Blessing, Healing, and Purification Element

Holy water is devoted primarily to divine service and used during rite of blessing. This concept originated in Rome, where the pontiffs used holy water for the protection against evil.<sup>1135</sup> There are three types of blessed water in Christian tradition that differ according to component, use, and the bless it received. Baptismal water serves for the administration of baptism and often receives the blessing during the Paschal vigil. Gregorian water is a lustal water that contains salt, ashes, and wine and used for consecrating altars and churches to ensure spiritual abundance. However, Lourdes water do not receive any rite of blessing and remain very popular in Christian imagination due to an idea of “miracles of Lourdes” that it might bring. Water receives also blessing in honour of saints and serves in the form of amulets for protection in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures.

<sup>1132</sup> The book of Genesis, chapter 24: 4-20.

<sup>1133</sup> The book of Genesis, chapter 24: 26, 27.

<sup>1134</sup> The book of Exodus chapter 2:11-21

<sup>1135</sup> Rich, A. (2004). *Dictionnaire des Antiquités romaines et grecques*, Molière.

Water is a sign of divine benediction that repeatedly saved believers from thirst. Divine blessing was crucial in saving Hagar and her son Ishmael from thirst and hunger in the desert. God promised Abraham a child of his wife Sara but Abraham lacked patience to wait for the promise fulfilment and had a child of his servant Hagar<sup>1136</sup> The reason Hagar departure to Mecca and her abandonment in the desert differs between religious versions. However, religious texts agree that Abraham's decision was under divine order. In the biblical texts, God heard Ismael crying because of thirst and opened Hagar's eyes to see a well so she gave her son water to drink.<sup>1137</sup> The Quran claims that Abraham prayed to God to have mercy on Hager and his son and not to let them perish.<sup>1138</sup> Hager, abandoned by Abraham in an arid area, started to breastfeed Ismail and quickly ran out of food or water. Ismail started yelling from thirst, which forced her to go to seek out help. She climbed *As-Safa* hill but to no avail then she climbed the *al-Marwa* hill and repeated that seven times without finding any help. Suddenly, she saw an angel digging at the ground with his wing until water came out of the ground. Muslims called then this water source *Zamzam well*. The path taken by Hagar between *As-Safa* and *al-Marwa* hills morphed into a ritual that Muslims should perform during Hajj pilgrimages and *Umrah*. The distance between the two small hills located in the Masjid Al-Haram of Mecca is approximately 450 m, which makes the seven trips back and forth three and half kilometres.

Unit 4 will draw on a steel bas-relief of Hagar and Ismael, a bottle of *Zamzam* water, and two holy water pendants for amulets used for protective purposes. A documentary film of four minutes will enhance unit 4 to provide visitors with an insight into the story of Hagar and water. It will shed light on the importance of water and the *Zamzam* well in pilgrimage, ablution, and cure.



Steel bas-relief, Hagar and Ismael, France, 19th century. © collection of Laurence Roux



Holy and healing water of Zamzam, 2019. © Collection of Mouhamed Hamdouni

<sup>1136</sup> Surah Hud 11, 71-73; Genesis, chapters 16- 21.

<sup>1137</sup> The book of Genesis, chapter 21, 14-19.

<sup>1138</sup> Surah Ibrahim 14: 37.



### Unit 5: Rituals of Obtaining Rain: An Interbreeding Between Pagan, Amazigh and Abrahamic Tradition

In all drought-stricken countries, prayers and ceremonies for rain exist regardless of religion. In the Abrahamic religions, religious rain making ceremonies are very similar to one another. Agriculture provides living for about two thirds of the population in North Africa, which gave rain a primordial importance in popular cultures. There is a clear survival of ancient beliefs related to water from pagan beliefs in Tunisian cultures, which over time fused with monotheistic traditions. The coexistence of the pagan worship of Anzar denotes the fact that a survival of a faith does not only encompass the religious sphere. Islam is thus a tunic that covers deepest Berbers, Romans, and Punic beliefs strongly embedded in the popular imagination. The most common pagan rain making ritual is the promenade of the doll, called also “Ghandja”, which means in Berber language the big spoon to draw the sauce. This doll is a personification of the ancient rain goddess (woman of Anzar) that should be escorted around the village and then plunged into the water to recall the rain of winter.<sup>1139</sup> The ritual of wetting by streaming water on the effigy and doll’s carriers and the bath of procession actors in the river reflects an African popular belief calming that spreading water attracts rains.

It should however be pointed out that religious formula uttered during the ceremony are essential to receive divine blessing. The most common prayer is *"Give rain to the believers, O God, give us rain"*. An old religious custom uses blood offering in small farming towns and agricultural areas to receive rain. In extreme drought periods, Tunisian villagers sacrifice domestic animals, mutton, goat, or chicken and use their meat to prepare a communal meal for

<sup>1139</sup> Probst-Biraben, J. H. (1932). *Les rites d'obtention de la pluie dans la province de Constantine*. Journal des Africanistes, 2(1), p. 96-97.

ritual called *Tlob ennaw*.<sup>1140</sup> In the popular imagination, shedding blood is also pouring a bracing liquid, which could help acquire more water to fertilize the vegetation.<sup>1141</sup> In the Tunisian Berber village Chneni, farmers burned branches, hung it on the tail of a goat and let him flee as a religious plea to make a rainfall. Frightened from fire, the goat runs away and never comes back, which reminds of the biblical scapegoat that Jews sacrificed to God by sending it alive in the desert for an inevitable death.<sup>1142</sup> Berber tribes in Chneni were Judaized before the arrival of Islam, which means that Jewish tradition had a marked impact on Araboerberian custom.

Tunisian Jews call God, asking for rain (*guechem*)<sup>1143</sup> during the holy day *Shemini Atzeret*<sup>1143</sup> at the beginning of the winter season, and pray for dew (*tal*) during the holy Pesach at the beginning of the summer. For Christians, the prayer of petition is an integral part of their faith that may concern material goods as well as spiritual goods. During the drought period, praying for rain becomes then a legitimate prayer of petition and an opening up to transcendence. In Tunisia, the limited number of Christians makes such practice very rare, not to say non-existent. However, there is a common Muslim practice called *salat al Istisqa* to ask God for rain. It is a prayer recited by Muslims when in need of rain and is composed of two prayer units followed by an invocation and Dua for forgiveness.<sup>1144</sup> More strikingly, in case of rainfall deficit, Tunisian Ministry of Religious Affairs takes the lead, calls for a rain petition prayer, and sets the place of prayer, as it happened on Sunday, January 17, 2016. Tunisian marabouts have a say in rainmaking ceremonies in various agricultural regions known for their hot and arid climate. In popular imagination, holy men possess a blessing and miraculous properties called *Baraka* and could intercede with God to ask for rain and prosperity. In areas such as Gamouda, a feast called *Zerda*<sup>1145</sup> takes place yearly near the Tomb of *Sidi Mansour* or that of *Sidi Ali Ben Oun*, in which people dedicate religious meals for fertility, rain, and abundant harvests. In these spiritual feasts, religious confraternities organize solemn dances and circle of dhikr, which reflect the survival of some Dionysian and magic dances of the Greeks and Romans.

Unit 5 will draw on a *Shemini Atzeret*, three photographs, two prints, a postcard, and religious text of a ritual procession of Ghandja and the doll of Omek tango. Unit 5 will include a

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<sup>1140</sup> Arabic terms that means asking for rain.

<sup>1141</sup> Probst-Biraben 1932, p 100.

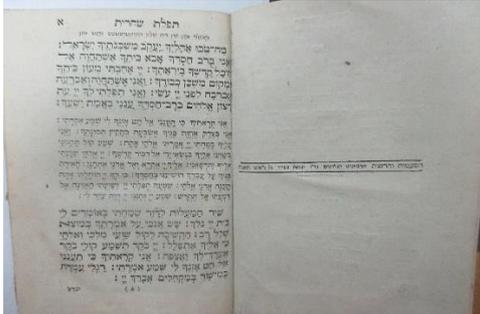
<sup>1142</sup> The high priest of Israel sacrificed two goats, one for the Lord, the other for Azazel, fallen angel, demon of arid places (Leviticus 16, 8).

<sup>1143</sup> Is a Jewish holiday prescribed in the Bible, celebrated on the eighth day from the beginning of the Sukkot and marking the beginning of the rainy season, Leviticus 23:36.

<sup>1144</sup> Probst-Biraben 1932, p 95.

<sup>1145</sup> A feast organized by the community during drought period. Ibid.

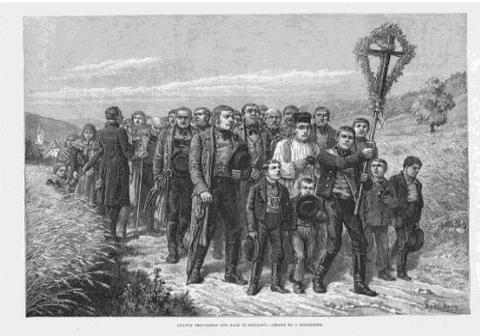
documentary film on the practice of Ommek Tangou to explain the process of dressing the doll, procession through the streets, and bathing in the river. The documentary film also sheds light on the Islamic and Jewish rain making prayer.



Shemini Atzeret, Judaica, France 19th century, © collection of Laurence Roux



Tunisian Jewish family under the sukkah, Djerba, 1980. Picture of Frediric Brenner.<sup>1146</sup>



Print, rain making prayer (Germany 1885). © collection of Kameliya Tileva



Print, rain making ceremony (Romania 1905), © collection of Kameliya Tileva



Postcard, prayer of rain, Kairouan, 20th century, © Mohamed Hamdane, [www.cultpatr.blogspot.com/](http://www.cultpatr.blogspot.com/)



Rain making prayer, "salat al Istisqa", Tunisia, 2016. © [www.tunisienumerique.com/](http://www.tunisienumerique.com/)

<sup>1146</sup> Allali and Al 2005, p 153.



Omek Tango (fiancé of the rain) North Africa, 20th century. © <https://www.flickr.com/>



Ritual procession of "Omek Tanga", Tunisia, 21st century, © [www.culptr.blogspot.com/](http://www.culptr.blogspot.com/)

### Unit 5: Water in Judaism: Symbols and Practices

In Judaism, water is a vector of purity and spirituality that recalls the purification of Moses in term of body and clothing to be able to receive the divine law. Water intervenes in the unfolding of many Jewish worships and establishes a boundary between the sacred and profane, human and divine, temporal and spiritual, and material and immaterial. Water rituals, whether by sprinkling, ablution, or immersion, are of vital importance in Jewish tradition because of their requirement in the defilement of sin. This is borne out by the fact that the words referring to the purifying rites are mentioned 618 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1147</sup> The book of Leviticus represents a key reference that organizes and provide accurate details on purification rituals.<sup>1148</sup> Many Jewish holidays, whether religious or not, require water and include one or more hand washing such as *Bar Mistvah*, Easter prayer, or *Rosh Ashanah*. More significantly, the ritual of washing one's hands after reading sacred texts does not regard only the priests, but also applies to faithful to disassociate religious activities from profane activities. Moreover, Jews observe and perform an ablution called *Netilat Jadajim* before Morning Prayer and eating by running water three times on each hand using a pitcher, which adds more spirituality to their acts.

The same purification logic applies for woman who give birth and should practice an immersion ritual called *Tevila* after the delivery. For a male newborn, the ritual takes place forty days after the delivery and eighty days for a girl.<sup>1149</sup> In Tunisia, native Jews *Twansa* perform a newborn bath, *Bar Mistvah* bath, and a wedding bath, which closely resembles Muslim tradition. Water

<sup>1147</sup> Kongolo, C. (2001). *Les lustrations d'eau dans les écrits bibliques*. Laval théologique et philosophique, 57(2), p. 305.

<sup>1148</sup> Péter-Contesse, R. (1993). *Lévitique 1-16*. Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament, Genève, Labor et Fides, p. 2

<sup>1149</sup> Darrigrand, M. (2015). *Eau Mythes et Symboliques*, synthèse de travaux de Jules GRITTI, Etudes et Comportements, p. 41.

holds particular significance in deceased purification rituals since each body part has to be washed according to a specific ritual, using cold or hot water, soap, and essences. It is important to note that the Mikveh represents a key component in Jewish holy architecture because its construction shall precede the building of a synagogue. It reinforces the concept of separation between pure and impure and regulates the relationship between men and women through the laws of the Niddah or the laws of family purity called “*taharat hamishpa'ha*”.<sup>1150</sup> Body immersion in the water of the mikvah is part of the process of conversion into Judaism. Jews build the Mikveh generally into the ground and should contain at least 40 Seha (about 570 litres) of non-stagnant water (rain, river, or seawater). Jewish women should dive three times in it before the wedding, after a birth, and seven days after the end of the menstrual period to be able to have sexual intercourse.

Unit 5 will draw on a set for ritual bath, copper water container, bride’s wicker basket for ritual bath, a painting, and two photographs dealing with Jewish ritual baths in Tunisia.



Ritual bath set containing salt, oil, powder, and candles. France. © collection of Laurence Roux



Copper containers for the ritual bath, North Africa, 1st quarter 20th century. © mahJ / Christophe Fouin



Painting by Alexandre Lunois, Jewish purification bath, 1863, North Africa, 19th century. © mahJ



Wicker basket for the bride's clothes, ritual bath, North Africa, 20th century, 1st quarter © mahJ

<sup>1150</sup> Nizard, S. (2013). *Une pratique corporelle «discrète»: le bain rituel*. *Ethnologie française*, 43(4), p. 601.



Jewish woman having a ritual bath in a Mikveh, 21st century. © www.mikvahproject.com



Photograph, Or-Thora synagogue and Mikeveh, Tunis. © M. B. C. Ahmed , www.webdo.tn

### Unit 6: Water in Christianity: Symbols and Practices

The New Testament represents an extension of values and symbols claimed in Judaic tradition, especially with regard to the water. Water is a founding element in Christianity because of its natural, social, and religious significances that constitute a central component of the Eucharist and resurrection. Water is then a conductive core of divinity and an inseparable element of the Jesus figure. Like Moses, Jesus had a very close relationship with water; he controlled it, walked on it, and even calmed storms. Water served Jesus as a persuasion tool to spread his faith and make miracles happen, as it was with the healing of paralytic or the transformation of water into wine. Water in its natural state may morph into spiritual and living water and the best example of such conversion remains the episode of Jesus asking for water from the Samaritan woman. To quench his physical thirst, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water, and proposed her to drink from the divine water to quench her spiritual thirst.<sup>1151</sup> Thirst expresses then the desire for God.<sup>1152</sup> It is worth noting that primal religions have influenced some Christian religious rituals using water as the water spray on tombs, which has emerged with the Maya-Quiché.<sup>1153</sup>

The baptism is one of the most symbolic rituals in Christianity because Christians, regardless of their distinctions, recognize it as a central sacrament. Baptism is an act that connects, creates relation between faithful and God, and represents a capital ritual that shapes religion.<sup>1154</sup> The contact with holy water recalls the deep meaning of the Christ's message and reminds of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and his naming as a son by the voice of God.<sup>1155</sup> For Catholics,

<sup>1151</sup> John 4: 5-42.

<sup>1152</sup> Psalm 42:2.

<sup>1153</sup> Vallet, O. (2003). *L'héritage des religions premières*, collection Découvertes Gallimard.

<sup>1154</sup> Darrigrand 2015, p. 46.

<sup>1155</sup> Matthew 3, 13-17, Mark 1, 9-11, Luke 3, 21-2.

the salvation depends on an effusion and immersion from water to commemorate the death, resurrection, and saving sacrifice of Jesus.<sup>1156</sup> Protestants do not perform baptism early in life, but perform it after a personal and religious maturation (from the age of fifteen). Protestants do not bless water like Catholics and Orthodox and do not consider baptism a carrier of salvation.

In Tunisia, the evangelical Protestantism evolved over the past twenty years, which increased the number of adult baptisms, in particular in coastal areas of Tunis, Sousse, and Bizerte. In these cities, baptisms are practiced in churches, most often in an inflatable pool, although there is an uptrend of performing it in the sea during spring or summer. Rare are the churches equipped with a baptistery and only a small church in the area of "*Little Sicily*" disposes of a rectangular tank for a baptism.<sup>1157</sup> For Tunisian Christians, being baptized at the sea is more practical (celebrate many baptisms simultaneously), symbolic (commitment to other faithful), and aesthetic (festive dimension of the sea). The ceremony takes place as follows: A Tunisian pastor completely immerses the new convert, recites a passage from the Bible, and performs a collective prayer, in which all participants pray facing the baptized.<sup>1158</sup> Then all participants bathe in the sea, pray again by holding hands, and then share a packed lunch from home. In spite of the fact that baptism by immersion is more significant, Tunisian Catholics are baptized by being sprinkled after pouring water three times over their head. In the renewal of their baptismal promises, the baptized should sprinkle holy water, whether in a church in front of the community or privately at home. Tunisia has about 25,000 Christians, of which Catholics constitute a majority and only a minority practice their worship regularly. The Catholic Church uses in Tunisia a Latin liturgical rite and has only one archdiocese situated in Tunis: The non-metropolitan archdiocese of Tunis.

Unit 6 will draw on a Baptism jug, silver baptism plaque, female outfit lace dress, Holy water, Terracotta font with Christ baptism scene, and three photographs of Baptism and renewal promises performed in the cathedral of Tunis.

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<sup>1156</sup> John 3: 5

<sup>1157</sup> Boissevain 2014, p. 15.

<sup>1158</sup> Ibid, p 22.



Earthenware baptism jug, 20th century, Tunisia, © collection of Verbrunia aras



Silver baptism plaque for girl, 20th century, Tunisia, © collection of Verbrunia Aras



Baptism female outfit lace dress and headdress, 20th century, Tunisia, © collection of Verbrunia aras



Holy water (Jordan River) for baptism, France, 2019. © collection of Eugen Rubel



Terracotta font with Christ baptism scene, 19th century, © collection of Giuseppe Peluso



Baptism of a child, Tunis Cathedral, December, 2017. © Facebook page of the Cathedral of Tunis

### Unit 7: Water in Islam – Symbols and Practices

Water occupies an important place in Islam because it symbolizes purity (Ta-hara) in Islamic culture, which considers it the half of one's faith. As in Judaism and Christianity, water constitutes in Islam the secret of life and a God blessing. The surah 52:49 in the Quran says,

"Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and we separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?".<sup>1159</sup> The Quran devotes considerable attention to the water since it quotes the word "Maa" (water) 63 times and word "Ayn" (well/spring) a dozen times. It also mentions that there are two fountains in Paradise with water giving eternal life called: "Salsabil" and "Tasnim".<sup>1160</sup> Before receiving the revelation, the prophet Mahomet asked to cover him with a cloak and to sprinkle him with water to remove stain and acquire purification.<sup>1161</sup> This act has then become afterward a ritual cleansing called "Wudu", practiced before praying from the age of seven. There are two types of ritual ablutions in Islam, which vary according to a person's degree of defilement. In case of light impurity, the person should perform a small ablution in a precise and significant order,<sup>1162</sup> and in case of high impurity, they should perform a body immersion called "Ghusl" or *Ta-hara Kobra*". The principle of body immersion "Ghusl" closely resembles the Jewish purification ritual "Tevila", which shows that religions may influence each other. This similarity is also noticeable in prohibiting touching the Quran in an impure state,<sup>1163</sup> as is the case with the Torah in Judaism. The Quran states that only those who are purified will go to gardens of Eden where streams flow, which shows that water is also an element of reward apart from being a purifying component.<sup>1164</sup>

Water plays a primary role in Islamic worship since it enables ablution necessary to pray, use the Quran, and wear washed clothes to be able to join a collective prayer at the mosque. Ordinary ablutions are provided in most mosques in equipped water points called "Midha", contrarily to full-body purification that takes place in bathrooms or hammams and require sometimes body oil and perfume. In an absence of water or in case of illness, Muslims may have recourse to a dry ablution called Tayammum. If a person is able to fulfil ordinary ablution, he can go through Tayammum, even in a state of major impurity. Tayammum consists of four obligatory acts: Intention, placing the two palms together on a stone or on sand, passing the two palms over the entire face, passing the palm of the left hand over the entire back of the right hand, and then the palm of the right hand over the entire back of the left hand.

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<sup>1159</sup> Surah Al-Anbya 21:30

<sup>1160</sup> Surah Al-Mutaffifin 83:27-28/ surah Al-Mutaffifin 83:27-28.

<sup>1161</sup> Surah Al-Muddaththir 74: 1-4.

<sup>1162</sup> 1-Washing the face: rinsing the mouth and the nose / 2- washing the hands to the forearms / 3- washing the feet to the ankles / 4- Wiping the entire head and ears.

<sup>1163</sup> Surah Al-Waqi'a 56: 79

<sup>1164</sup> Surah Taha 20:76.

Unit 7 will draw on abluition copper ewer, dress, sand, stone, and set of perfume and body oil for full-body purification and a postcard of an abluition scene with stream water.



Ablution copper ewer, 20th century, Tunis, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati



Ablution and praying dress, 21st century, Tunis, © collection of Mohamed Hamdouni



Ablution Sand from Makkah, 21st century, Tunisia, © collection of Mohamed Hamdouni



Ablution stone in case of illness, 21st century, Tunisia, © collection of Mohamed Hamdouni



Perfume and body oil for full-body purification, Tunisia, 2019 © collection of Mohamed Hamdouni



Postcard, abluition with stream water, Tunisia, 20th century, © collection of Mahmoud Naffati

### Unit 8: Three Immersive Rooms for Three Religions

Water represents in the Abrahamic religion a vector of purity and spirituality that shapes a limit between the material and immaterial and between the humans and divine. It is of natural, social, religious, and spiritual importance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and takes the form of

several practices such as ablution, sprinkling, and immersion. Each immersive room will be dedicated to a religion to provide visitors with an interactive and playful insight into the purification practices. Based on historical facts, these multimedia spaces will bring a new perspective to the experience of religious practices and acts on visitors' senses. Films and educational tools for schoolchildren will allow an awareness on the use of water in religion and introduce architecture's components such as "mikvah" and "midha" in an interactive and playful way. Through different experimentation modules, visitors will discover commonalities and divergences between purification practices and symbolism of water in each confession. I based my idea on the approach of S. B. Plate to stimulate the sense for a better understanding of religion.

#### 2.4. Fourth and Fifth Floor: Temporary Exhibition Space

To attract and interest the public, a Museum of Religion should organize temporary exhibitions at a rate of at least one or two exposures per year. It should not only seek to transmit a religious heritage but rather make it known and appreciated, share it with a diverse public, and incite it to come back with each new exhibit. To regenerate a collection on religion, it is necessary to deal with current themes, celebrate a discovery or new object, and host itinerating exhibits. A Museum of religion should surprise, astonish, and interest to be able to survive, which require a driving force that does not adversely affect the permanent collection; on the contrary, it strengthens and completes it with an event component. It leads to a renewal and extension of other public categories usually absent in Tunisian museums. My concept seeks to regenerate collections and connect them with cultural events, music, live shows, cinema, and contemporary literature. It should offer in a limited time an unusual set of discoveries, activities, and services, which is rare to have them all gathered in one place.

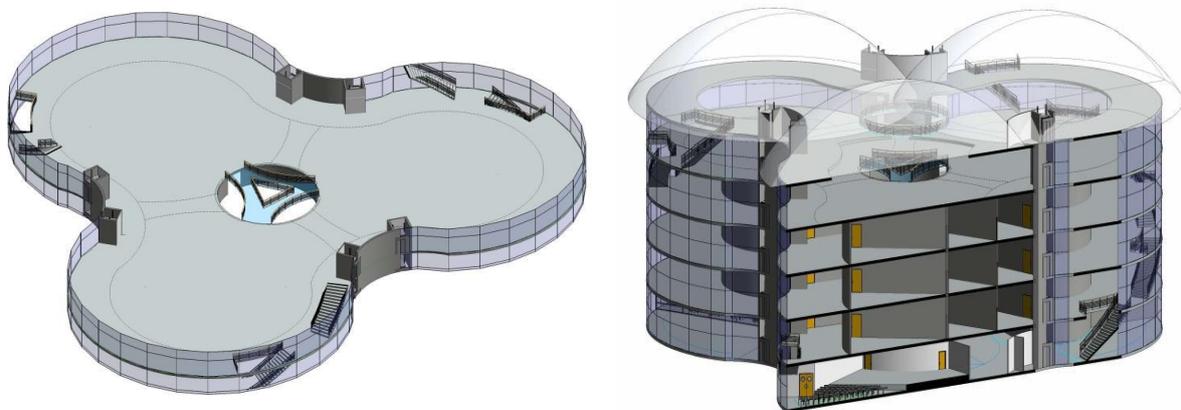


Figure 52 . Temporary exhibition space ©Hamdouni

I purposely freed the temporary exhibit's space from all architectural constraints and dividing walls and conceived of an area of 1753 m<sup>2</sup> that draws on two communicating floors in order to allow visitors see the exposure from above (floor 5). I conceived the Temporary exhibition space with an original decor and daylighting with a transparent roof to encourage artists and event organizers to rent it for cultural events. A museum of religion should be a forum with an economic innovation that supplements its budget and guarantees finding sponsors and patrons. A museum of religion should host educational activities, excursions of education, in order to be able to shed religious misconceptions from an early age, dispel communal misunderstandings, stereotypes, and reveal cultural distinctions and diversity. It should provide educational mediations intended for a captive public of schools, colleges, and high schools in order to include groups usually excluded in exhibitions of religions and generate confidence and trust with other confessions and believers.

With the reduction in resources of cultural institutions, the museum of religion must make economies of scale through creative strategies such as crowdfunding or living labs. Several citizens wish to invest their money directly in projects representing them in view of the emotional ties that link them to certain objects. Civil society and cultural organizations should contribute to the enrichment of collections and to cultural dissemination policies. In my concept, I rely on the patronage and donations to acquire new equipment for the teaching rooms such as computers and tablets. Moreover, non-profit heritage foundations, which aim to promote knowledge and conserve national religious heritage, should play a major role in the restoration of religious artifacts. Many museums of religions showed that Co-production is an ideal solution to be able to lead large-scale research projects and create expansive and large exhibitions. This should also apply for the museum of religion in Tunisia in order to ensure its success and sustainability.

## Conclusion and Reflection on Exhibiting Religious Objects in Museums and Conceiving a Museum of Religion in Tunisia

Religion is a significant component in society that plays a crucial role in politics, culture, conflict resolution, living together, and might contribute to economic development. The significance of this phenomenon within cultures made several scholars claims that it would be erroneous to speak of a society without a “system of belief”.<sup>1165</sup> The sheer number of religion’s definitions gives an indication of its change, shift, and adjustment with other phenomena. Many disciplinary fields tried to define religion using a substantial approach that aims to identify it in its essence or using a functional approach that delineates it according to its requirements and productions. However, it is important to stress that religion, as an intangible social construction, does not represent a fixed reality due to its constant change and evolution, which means that producing a sustainable definition will be a process that lacks in scientificity.<sup>1166</sup> Religion goes through various mutations, which requires a constantly enhanced review to its functions and significance. Moreover, giving it a uniform definition would not fit all the religious expressions and does not apply to all living religions. That means that is not necessary to define religion to apprehend and explore its dimension and impact on the identity construction, political stability, and social progress. Religion may foster the living-together and acceptance of difference, although it can also lead to tensions, agitations, and violence. As any other social phenomenon that goes through change, religion has also turned into a brutal factor that feeds the phenomenon of fundamentalism. This metamorphosis that marks contemporary history and triggers violence on the name of religions in the four corners of the world makes one think of a number of problems linked to the role of religion in society and the importance of understanding this phenomenon.

This is reminiscent of the classic Enlightenment thesis that opposed religion to science and required a decline of religion’s domination. It would be wrong to completely reject the thesis of their incompatibility and presume that it reflects an outdated rationalist view, or even an anticlericalism. It would be more appropriate to put it into perspective, because if there is a conflict between certain forms of knowledge and religion, or between certain forms of religion and knowledge, they would disappear when it goes to other types of knowledge and other types of religion. It is therefore essential to understand religion, its complexity, manifestations, but

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<sup>1165</sup> Bonte, P., & Izard, M. (1991) *Dictionnaire de l’ethnologie et de l’anthropologie*. Dir. Paris: Quadrige/PUF, p. 62-111.

<sup>1166</sup> Beckford, J. A. (2003). *Social theory and religion*. Cambridge University Press, p. 1-10.

also its relation to world problems. It will then be necessary to make use of a knowledge that provides a historical distancing and presupposes a neutral investigation in order to treat the diversity of religious facts as a non-polemical reality, which is the core of the study of religion. The study of religion avoids all form of religion folklorization since it elucidates the hermeneutical singularities of each tradition and sheds light on all phenomenological manifestations and religious behaviours. The study of religions explains, compares, and interprets religion in a cross-cultural perspective, which stimulates knowledge, enhances reflection, and encounters and rejects fundamentalism and antagonisms. A discipline that makes use of many approaches, which makes the subject of religion more easily understandable and intelligible.<sup>1167</sup>

Tensions between religions, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and its instrumentalization for political ends have often led to conflicts. The problem is caused by a lack of awareness and understanding for religious otherness, mainly due to a policy choice that attends to hide religious, ethnic, and political plurality. A bad composition between religion and politics often escalates into tension, violence, religious oppression, and makes religion lose its social responsibility. This fact holds true for Tunisia that inherited a political system marked by a state religion, coupled with an impaired recognition of religious minorities and institutions, which quite often led to paradoxical results. Islam as a state religion has taken charge of society in terms of mores and traditions, which has resulted on the one hand in the weakening of minority religions, and on the other hand in a re-Islamization of institutions.<sup>1168</sup> This populist democracy vis-à-vis religion has paved the way for fundamentalism and violent ideological rise, triggered a rebellion against cultural institutions such as museums, and condemned them for blasphemy. This stance morphed in acts of violence and a terrorist attack against the Bardo Museum in March 2015, which shows that State policy in terms of religious education, awareness raising, and tolerance, is completely flawed. For fear of religious movement or social conflict, the state put forward a doctrine that discriminated against religious practitioners, hid other confessions, and limited the visibility and activity of the religious minorities. This oppressive policy has made from religion a taboo subject, frightening people and excluding this issue from media, schools, universities, and museums.

When it comes to exhibition on religion, visitors' reactions are often unforeseeable and range from curiosity and satisfaction to reverence and condemnation.<sup>1169</sup> This fact may explain the

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<sup>1167</sup> Capps, W. H. (1995). *Religious studies: The making of a discipline*. Fortress Press, p. 14.

<sup>1168</sup> Ben Achour 2000, p. 95

<sup>1169</sup> Arthur 2000, p 4.

avoidance of tackling living traditions of other faiths in public collection for fear of shocking Muslim sensibilities. Religion was also not addressed in art and just a few painters and artists showed interest for the production of religious works and crossroads between faith. The stance that refrained from dealing with living beliefs and tradition in museums aiming at diminishing the veneration of holy places and relics has created a religious "*unculture*" and a lack of knowledge and understanding for religious otherness. Establishing a religion traced by the state and excluding it from museum setting for fear of "superstition" caused ignorance, mistrust, and prejudice against other faiths out of unfamiliarity with others' religions. As a result, for this repression, religion became a spontaneous phenomenon occurring without a culture of awareness that individuals personalize it in function of situation and aspiration. Consequently, a large section of Tunisian youth fell into the trap of radicalization, which implies involving a lot of effort to develop curiosity and openness to otherness in order to create a favourable environment for learning about other religions.

It is true that the construction of knowledge, awareness raising, and education for religious understanding and tolerance starts from a very young age at schools, however it remains insufficient and requires a collective strategy that implies a collaboration of many cultural institutions, but more especially that of museums.<sup>1170</sup> Teaching religion is a complex and delicate task that requires on one hand suitable textbooks, ethics code, and qualified teachers, and on the other hand appropriate museum setting that treats religions on an equal basis and incites a deep reflection on religious pluralism and multiculturalism. This socio-historical approach allows individuals to be acquainted with a shared heritage and a common past linking the different religious communities. Moreover, it would help visitors of all ages immerse themselves in the Tunisian religious heritage and familiarize themselves with other religions. Many exposures dealing with religion showed that working on a positive "*comparativism*" and putting emphasis on religious similarities and shared values as well as a cut-off point, can significantly reduce the identity enclosure and religious antagonisms and familiarize visitors with the acceptance of difference.<sup>1171</sup> The valuing of religious diversity and interpreting all religious singularities represent a key asset for learning and understanding others, and does not constitute a threat for Islam but an opportunity to show that Islam accepts difference and encourages societal participation.

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<sup>1170</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

<sup>1171</sup> Interview with Manoël Pénicaud.

Religion has become a field of social identities and displaying religious artifacts in museums acquired particular importance over the last two centuries and turned into an integral component of international museum work. However, unlike historical and archaeological objects that became widely accessible in Tunisia museums, religious artifacts remain neglected and seem threatened by oblivion. Exhibitions on religion primary tackle traditional beliefs as well as religions of the ancient world in a tangible aspect and intentionally discard objects' sacred dimension. Public collections do not place enough emphasis on interpreting meanings and outlining religious practices and distinctiveness of living religions, but rather give greater weight to the artistic artisanship and aesthetic and archaeological values of objects. Until 2003, religious terms such as Christianity and Judaism were not used in history documentary on Tunisian television and were replaced with other terms such as "*ancient religions*".<sup>1172</sup> This censorship has often precluded the broadcasting of some programs just for containing terms from different religious registers.

Several ethnographic observations carried out in several Tunisian museums such as Bardo, Nabeul, and Sousse museums enabled me to conclude that curators do not pay considerable attention to the interpretation and understanding of sacredness, spirituality, and intrinsic value of faiths. This wilful choice hides the functional sense and spiritual value of religious practice, desecrates religious artifacts to artworks, and reduces their significance. I could also conclude that Tunisian collections tackle religion only in its static dimension and not in its dynamic dimension (practices) and provide visitors only with a geographical, social, and historical reading that discard the devotional and factual dimension of religion. Museums are still focusing on displaying religious artifacts, mainly from Pagan eras, which pushed the Jewish community to take the lead and create a private collection in la Goulette called "*House of Jewish memory/Dar Dhekra*".<sup>1173</sup> This isolation based on a political positioning hijacked the devotional meaning and spiritual power of religious artifacts by displaying them as materials of curiosity to amaze tourists through an archaeological approach that does not mandate open dialogue across religions. However, many temporary exposures on religion conducted in Tunisian museums showed that avoiding addressing the sacred dimension of objects for fear of strengthening their veneration of that of saints and relics became pointless. There is no need to alleviate the retrograde thinking of religion because society and ways of thinking have evolved, and it became necessary to provide Tunisian visitors with new avenues for reflection to improve their knowledge and understanding for religious otherness and sacredness. The principal

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<sup>1172</sup> Interview with lotfi Rahmouni.

<sup>1173</sup> I personally was one of the curator of this private collection of arts and traditions of Judaism.

argument in support of this stance is that there will be always a mutation, relocation of meaning, and veneration in form of personhood in museums, whether a worship of *sacred* object or worship of art.<sup>1174</sup> While some countries such as Britain focused on showing primarily the “*sunny side*” of its religious history, contrary to other countries such as Germany who used a rigorous appraisal of their history, Tunisia is not showing neither one nor the other side of its religious history and richness, which holds back progress toward the betterment of religious exposures.

It has thus become a necessity to give a great deal of importance to the immaterial dimension of objects, which is a vital complementary dimension of Tunisian common heritage. Tunisian museums that had not the sufficient budgetary resources to invest heavily in this area and to take a comprehensive approach to religious heritage should change their perspectives and go beyond the touristic approach that only highlights the archaeological and aesthetic value of the religious patrimony. It has become urgent to stop avoiding addressing sensitive subjects related to religion in museums and considering that displaying objects of different religion side by side would be a sacrilege that would instigate critique and social rejection. This element represents an important key focus in my research problem, which I addressed using two scientific methods: an empirical survey and a series of key informant interviews. By interviewing a priest, an imam, and a rabbi in Tunisia about the sensitivity on displaying religious objects belonging to different religions together, the response was almost the same with a difference in some detail. The three religious leaders agreed that there is no sin, shame, or blame attached to exhibiting religious objects together if there is coherence and no distortion or offence to moral sensibilities or religious feelings. The only requirement is that the concept should show respect for the religious convictions in their singularities and that a difference does not mean a complete separation. The interviewees stressed the importance of a cautious and well-thought approach that counters prejudices, stereotypes, and religious condescension without changing facts and by keeping each religion its specificities and particularities.<sup>1175</sup> They also emphasized that it is important to be very careful when dealing with religious artifacts because of the sacred character of some objects that might be problematic in being exhibited for the public, and might often require various conditions to ensure respect and purification. Indeed, some religions maintain that wrong orientation, position, or association of object may disrupt their sacred energy and spiritual balance, which implies great attention to their sacredness in storing and

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<sup>1174</sup> Clair 2009, p. 30-31.

<sup>1175</sup> Interviews conducted with the Imam Ezzedine Daly, Rabbi Daniel Cohen and Guillaume Bruté de Remur.

displaying them to guard against igniting religious sensibilities.<sup>1176</sup> C. Paine calls the process used for sensitive materials a “*Respect Treatment*” and classifies it in five main practices categories: Handling, seeing, storage, treatment, and active honouring.<sup>1177</sup> This demonstrates very clearly that an exhibition dealing with religion can guarantee respect for sacredness when it draws on a shared work between curators and religious men to avoid any infringement of objects’ sacredness, exigency, and significance. In this way, curators have to find a compromise that on one hand ensures respect for object sacredness and on the other helps visitors become acquainted with unfamiliar beliefs and customs.

Tunisian Rabbi Daniel Cohen claims that it is possible to find an acceptable compromise to ensure respect for sacred objects and symbols without jeopardizing the basic goal of an exposure. He stressed that it is possible to exhibit a few pages of the Torah instead of placing the whole book in a showcase, which helps visitors to get a sense of what the Torah may look like without creating a religious insensitivity with the belief.<sup>1178</sup> Similarly, it would not be preferable to use the Koran as an exponent for cultural purposes because it constitutes an infringement of its sacredness. Tunisian Imam Ezzedine Daly claims that there is no direct prohibition of using religious artifacts for educational reasons on the condition that these objects would be treated with respect and consideration.<sup>1179</sup> Proof of this is that several museums in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey are displaying very old copies of the Koran. This challenge appears to be less complicated in Christianity since objects maintain their factual and “*objectual*” aspects both within and outside the church without desecration.<sup>1180</sup> My research into the issue of displaying sensitive materials within museums has revealed that it is possible to find a way out of the problem of desacralization by establishing a balance between religious and museum requirements. There is no infringement of displaying sacred objects and creating religious intercession with other beliefs and aligning objects with artifacts from other religions as long as objects are clearly defined and properly interpreted. Furthermore, and most importantly, museums could put great emphasis on giving meaning to neglected religious objects, revitalize endangered practices and traditions, and raise awareness and critical thinking about social issues and values through their exposures.

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<sup>1176</sup> Mairesse 2014.

<sup>1177</sup> Paine 2013, p 58.

<sup>1178</sup> Interview with the Rabbi of La Goulette, Daniel Cohen.

<sup>1179</sup> Interview with Ezzedine Daly Iman of Brahmia Mosque

<sup>1180</sup> Interview with the priest Guillaume Bruté de Remur.

It is important to point out that curators should focus much more intention on tackling “*Religious Reality*” as a historically attestable aspect of religion to show diversity, far less than on “*Reality of Religion*” charged with spirituality and reference to gods.<sup>1181</sup> This distinction would prevent misunderstandings and conflicts such as what happened between the Museum of French Revolution and the church that reclaimed the return of artifacts on the grounds of the museum’s non-conformity with ritual requirements. In “*Shared Holy Places*”, objects’ sacredness was a key element of concept, but did not constitute its core component, which helped provide a posture of respect, distance, and neutrality to all sacred objects. Despite difficulties encountered in materializing religious traditions, rituals, or ways of thinking, its curators succeeded in putting the spiritual experience forward using religious artifacts within a framework of respect and attempted to retain their sacredness.<sup>1182</sup> Notwithstanding the criticism levelled against him for exhibiting religious vows taken from a memorial wall in Turkey, Pénicaud claims that his action is not a betrayal for the vows’ spiritual value, but rather a chance of survival as a testimony.<sup>1183</sup> This indicates that when all requirements are filled, religious material would maintain its “sacred” dimension and do not lose its spiritual value, which do not prevent visitors from praying in front of it. Many researches in the fields of museology, anthropology, and the study of religions claim that the issue of sacredness remains a personal interpretation that varies from one person to another according to many factors such as belief, culture, and environment.

For the purpose of testing eight hypotheses on the theme of dealing with religion within a museum in Tunisia, I carried out an empirical study in a quantitative way that sought to provide an unexplored quantified data. I used a “*hypothetico-deductive*” approach and a cross-sectional method to provide an image of a situation at a given moment (*Shared Holy Places*). One of the hypotheses investigated if juxtaposing artifacts coming from different religions would instigate critique and rejection among visitors or ignite religious sensitivities. On the basis of interviews with 300 on-site visitors (Chapter 3.4.2), I showed that there is no risk in displaying side by side religious artifacts from different religions; on the contrary, it has created ties between faiths and created incentives for visitors to put their criticism into perspective and accept religious otherness. Proof of this is that 9 out of 10 interviewees stressed the importance of the exposure in discovering new meanings of sharing and coexistence and 8 out of 10 attested that the visit was a good opportunity to develop a new religious knowledge. Moreover, I was able to

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<sup>1181</sup> Arthur 2000, p 9.

<sup>1182</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

<sup>1183</sup> Ibid

demonstrate that shedding light on religious differences and distinction among religious confessions and conflict between adherents of different religions was not problematic and did not trigger opposition. This puts into question a serious issue in Tunisian museums that fully focus on showing the half-full glass and the positive side of religion without tackling sensitive topics such as issues of faith, religious misunderstandings, and devotional differences. This demonstrates that using a shallow approach that does not criticize and prompt to reflect remains an incomplete approach that does not cover religion in all its dimensions, circumstances, and evolutions. I was also able to demonstrate that using a dynamic and thought-provoking approach that prevented falling in denial and hatred generated a good deal of interest amongst Tunisian visitors. This is borne out by the fact that more than nine out of ten on-site visitors interviewed (93, 3%) have rated well the coherence of exposure and the invitation to rethink religion in its commonality and discrepancy. Contrary to the widely held view which claims that showing religious division conflict and inter-ethnic difference in an exposure would cause considerable discomfort and annoyance, Tunisian visitors enjoyed the balance and coherence between both sides of religion. This means that camouflaging imperfections and hiding flaws of religion has proven to be a poor choice that lacks coherence and presents huge scientific loopholes. Finding coherence in enlightening the aspect of sharing between religions on one hand and in outlining the ripping apart of religious cohesion on the other represents an invaluable work tool in exhibitions dealing with religion and doesn't represent any risk for the acceptance of the concept.

The second focus of my research consisted in verifying the effectiveness of juxtaposing religious objects with artworks such as painting, engraving, and sculpture as well as with pictorial and visual media such as photographs and video in enhancing the understanding of meaning. More importantly, to review if such a juxtaposition would cause a deformation of meaning or an infringement for the aura of the religious artifacts. It is important to reiterate that the juxtaposition of religious objects with museographic tools was unthinkable and unacceptable in the recent past for numerous ethnic and cultural reasons.<sup>1184</sup> However, relying only on religious artifacts and manufactured objects to explain meanings leads often to a partial, closed, and frozen discourse. In the course of time, several factors inflicted this new blending as the difficulty of materializing tradition and showing the spatial and temporal transversality of religious objects and their scarcity in museums. Museums in France, Canada, England, Scotland, Russia, and Turkey have opted for this process to enhance the interpretation of

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<sup>1184</sup> O'neill 1995 p. 50.

meaning and adapt to museographical progression. Many curators claim that it is only through juxtaposition that it is possible to create links and continuum between objects, practices, and beliefs and that there is no religious deformation in using testimonies or video to explain worships.<sup>1185</sup> The heterogeneity of exponents serves the purpose of knowledge because it offers further complementarism and interactivity in terms of interpretation. My empirical investigation conducted in the exposure “*Shared Holy Places*”, which juxtaposed religious artifacts with paints, sculpture, images, print, testimonies, and films confirmed the success of this approach in improving visitors’ understanding and awareness of religion. Indeed, 87 % of the interviewees appreciated the museographic blending, of which 33.7% have were very impressed with the interbreeding (Chapter 3.4.2.2). The concept offered a good rector of diffusion and material translation of ethnographic observation, which by means of filmic image helped curators contextualize sacred objects and sites, interpret rituals, and transmit testimonies. It has liberated an aesthetic consciousness and improved objects’ comprehension by linking objects with their place of origin and associated rituals. Another important consideration is that it has not triggered any religious deformation and infringement on objects; contrariwise, it has created ties between significances. This is borne out by the fact that using pictorial and visual references did not generate criticism among visitors of “*Shared Holy Places*” in France, Tunisia, and Morocco; on the contrary, it has multiplied the reading levels.<sup>1186</sup> Screens and projections have been key visual and cognitive mediums in disclosing information and have largely participated in explaining religious similarities and distinctions in some practices such as pilgrimage, prayer, and funerals. The virtual simulation was not a noxious intrusion for religious sacredness or a damage for the aura of sensitive materials; it has only helped visitors understand objects’ meanings and symbolism. However, curators have to be very careful not to fall into overusing technological support, making religious significance disappear behind technology, and indulging in a form of “*Theatricalization*”. They should meet one requirement to prevent spoiling an exhibition: blending artifacts should not be arbitrary and should draw on specific scientific, choreographic, and aesthetic criteria to ensure coherence and compatibility.<sup>1187</sup> It is necessary to be very careful in choosing contents, pairing objects, preventing comparisons, taking sides, or defending any one belief. It is crucial to provide an appropriate interpretation to guard against igniting religious sensitivities.

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<sup>1185</sup> Two curators Ahlem Boussada and Manöel Penicaud that I interviewed confirmed this observation.

<sup>1186</sup> Interview with Manöel Penicaud.

<sup>1187</sup> Ardenne 1999, p. 69-70.

The third area of my research explored whether improving exhibition ergonomics in terms of objects' placement and display models as well as creating an immersive experience in terms of lighting and acoustic atmosphere would reveal the embedded value of exponents, foster interaction, and overcome boredom. In other words, if enhancing the perceived quality of the exposure would positively influence visitors' perceived value and acceptance for the exposure. Upgrading visitors' experience has become a standard practice in the new exposures dealing with religions. This enhancement draws on improving three crucial components of the scenography: Concept (materials, style, and technique), visual quality (space, colour, light, composition) and the socio-religious context (didactic, religious, ethnographic aims). When it comes to sensible themes such as religion, scenographers try to not leave any stone unturned and study all details in terms of colours, backgrounds, mock-up sizes, showcase's height, space allocation, and distance between objects in order to produce two forms of interaction: between artifacts and viewers and between objects and space.

Scenography plays an essential role in enhancing the perceived quality of the exposure since it reassures, drives away from spatial disorientation, and allows a good understanding of the environment. Scenic design, lighting design, and sound design have proven highly effective in constructing stage environments for objects, which allows enacting and producing senses and meanings. Blending space, sound, light, colours, text, and objects creates an intellectual, emotional, and even a rational experience that enhances audience engagement and reception.<sup>1188</sup> Scenography morphed over time into an art of describing and writing with sounds, light, and graphics, which is required to reinforce the content of religious exhibitions and create new ways of interpreting and sharing knowledge. It creates a kind of microcosm that boosts reflection and offers new avenues for understanding, which aids in reaching an active acquaintance with religion. Some scenographers consider that half of the work undertaken in displaying religious objects hinges on cultivating feelings, designing the appropriate environment, and creating a revealing experience, which involves the assistance of scenography, dramaturgy, and choreography.<sup>1189</sup>

Through my empirical study, I was able to show that the scenography materiality is not a décor or a backdrop that enhances artifacts' aesthetic but rather a non-human agent that complements the scenario and facilitates the understanding and interpretation of information on religion. Through a stimulating atmosphere, scenographers succeeded in transfiguring the space, affecting visitors' emotions, and making artifacts more lively, attractive, and significant, which

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<sup>1188</sup> McKinney, J. (2009). *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*. Cambridge University Press. p. 4.

<sup>1189</sup> Interview with Ahlem Boussada.

enormously helps extend visiting time, banish boredom, and better the understanding. Furthermore, I was able to establish that making use of visual, spatial, and scenic arts in displaying religious objects improved the perceived quality of the exposure, which positively enhanced visitors' perceived value and perception. Eight of ten visitors appreciated the temporal and sensory experience that they lived in "*Shared Holy Places*" and rated well the visual and aural mediation. Helping visitors feel and interpret instead of only reading generates a sense of "kinaesthetic empathy",<sup>1190</sup> which challenges traditional ways of thinking to step into the world of religion. This empathy is particularly relevant to convey a visceral and affective experience for Tunisian visitors who are not acquainted with other traditions and beliefs than Islam. All things together, it can be concluded that the more comprehensive and seductive religion is exhibited, the more visitors' understanding and awareness would be stimulated.

Translating a content dealing with religion into a three-dimensional interactive space based on multi-faceted stage setting has proven to be very effective in improving the appreciation of the Tunisian public. Proof of it is that all Tunisian temporary exposures dealing with religion in the last two decades drew on an interactive storytelling, a spatial choreography, and a smart scenography.<sup>1191</sup> It is important, however, to stress that despite the importance of objects' juxtaposition, art works complementarity, and scenography value in conceiving exposure on religion, they remain a double-edged sword that could prove detrimental to the exposure in case of miss-use. An improper juxtaposition of artifacts from different religious register might distort meaning, create confusion, generate misunderstanding, and offend some religious sensitivities. Similarly, an incorrect combination of religious artifacts with art works might generate a visual discordance, create irritation among visitors, and reduce the religious objects to artistic production, which leads to trivialization. In the same way, an overuse or misuse of scenography in staging religious objects might harm the artifacts and adversely affect the perception of information.

My museographical observation conducted at the Museum of Civilization and Religion in Hammamet enabled me to demonstrate the adverse impact of a mismanagement of these standards on the concept. As I have shown in Chapter 2.2.3, the exposure has a number of scenographic errors and conceptual weaknesses. It gives no ethical consideration for objects' value, significance, and sacredness, which does not comply with ICOM's code of ethics that clearly prohibits all forms of objects' mistreatment. There is no reactive ethical conservation of

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<sup>1190</sup> Reynolds, D., & Reason, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Kinesthetic empathy in creative and cultural practices*. Intellect Books, p. 300-334.

<sup>1191</sup> These Exhibitions are: young man of Byrcia, Bacchanales and Mapping sculpture in Carthage

objects in terms of synthetic, physical, and conceptual standards and no proactive conservation in terms of protection, which compromised objects' value and reinfused distorted meaning and significance. The minimalist and incoherent graphic design generated a visual noise and an aesthetic misbalance, which led to an erroneous interpretation of meanings and spoiled the story telling. There was no substantiated and studied juxtaposition of artifacts, which made the folkish aspect more dominant than the religious focus. My thorough assessment enabled me to conclude that it would be misleading to deem this collection a museum of religion because its primary target is to amaze tourists. It is rather a "*folk collection*" displaying "*folk religion*". This leads to the conclusion that conceiving a museum of religion is a challenging task that requires a great deal of attention to objects' sacredness and a multidisciplinary research collaboration to cover various religious dimensions and contexts. Despite all these shortcomings and warts, this collection remains the unique space that lights up the multifaceted religious identity of Tunisia and provides visitors with an insight into religious practice not as historical facts but rather as way of living. Unlike public collections that still neglect religious particularisms and otherness, this collection tried to establish a dialogue between religions even if it failed to do it properly. This means that there is an urgent need to create a museum of religion that displays religious difference as a humanizing element and not as a source of conflict to help visitors become acquainted with artifacts, practices, and conviction other than Islam.

Tackling religious diversity in a museum conceived for religion has become a political and cultural priority to come out of the religious closure and reduce the social division and mistrust in Tunisia. The religious split afflicting Tunisian society could be a considerable and substantive reason to conceive a museum of religion to provide answers, reduce concerns of distinction, fights, ignorance, and apathy. It would help raise religious awareness and develop social ties and civic engagement. This issue represented a crucial question of my research focus to demonstrate that time has come to dedicate a specific exhibition area for religion that became a subject of growing concern in Tunisia. I have demonstrated in chapter 1.4.3 that the religious identity could be a constitutive idea of a museum of religion in order to provide better knowledge and understanding of religious otherness, deconstruct wrong concepts, exclusive ways of thinking, and reduce discriminatory conduct. In a country, that has always hidden its religious heterogeneity; a museum of religion would add substantial value to national religious heritage and give it a collective dimension to reduce the fear of others. Such a project would positively contribute into the process of identity building and socialization of religious knowledge by calling into question ideological clichés and social concerns. The Tunisian

Minister of education shares this view and considers raising awareness about religious diversity is a lengthy process that starts at the youngest age at schools and grows at museums. This process requires a specific exhibition area and comprehensive study to provide more visibility to religious otherness, without touching on religious sensitivities.<sup>1192</sup> In cooperation with schools, a museum of religion would play a key role in reducing religious “*unculture*” and extend visitors’ knowledge in terms of religion by affording to the public necessary codes to decrypt objects’ significance.

My empirical investigation showed that 75.7% of the interviewed visitors considered that a museum of religion would be a good way to improve knowledge about religion. A large section of the Tunisian population is unaware of different practices and beliefs because they do not occur in public. However, this does not mean that they are not interested in being acquainted with other faiths. Indeed, six of ten of interviewed visitors negatively assessed the representation of other beliefs in public collections and claimed that the focus should broaden to cover other religions. At first blush, supposing that a museum of religion would be an instrument of societal influence would be far-fetched. However, various studies have proved that museums are prime influencing bodies that play significant roles in society development and raising awareness.<sup>1193</sup> It is true that alone a museum of religion would not help reach a social and religious equilibrium and is able to trigger a deterrence against ideological domination; however, it would help Tunisians self-critique and expand their experiences with religion, which is a good start toward learning to accept difference and religious otherness.

One of the major focuses of a museum is to mainstream social inclusion and equality and contributing to a more informed tolerant and inclusive society.<sup>1194</sup> Nonetheless, a museum of religion is not required to provide a discourse of truth and solve the religious slit between communities but rather afford necessary reading keys to improve the ways of understanding of religious issues and differences. Its main aim is neither reaching religious reconciliation nor coexistence nor establishing social harmony, but rather rekindling a constructive critical spirit, contributing in mind, broadening, and bringing religious and cultural spheres closer to the practical realities. Calling certainties, conformities, and immutable codes into question is an effective tool of freeing minds imprisoned by religious closure. Exploring different religious practices and explaining their background would undoubtedly help accept religious otherness

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<sup>1192</sup> Interview with Neji Jalloul.

<sup>1193</sup> Teruggi 1973, p. 129-135.

<sup>1194</sup> Sandell 2002.

and trigger a civic dialogue based on tolerance and acceptance. It is important to point out that recognizing the religious otherness does not mean abandoning one's norms and beliefs. On the contrary, it constitutes a prerequisite that helps build a cosmopolitan environment. Being acquainted with other beliefs fosters interculturality and religious understanding, which contributes in establishing a "*Rhizome Identity*"<sup>1195</sup> among communities and reduces the closure of "*Root Identity*". Museums should not be a comfort zone that conceals a part of the truth, but should provoke reflection on burning issues and act as a change agent to enhance confidence and trust.<sup>1196</sup> This means that a museum of religion should tackle religious singularities, ambiguities, distinctions, and conflicts as well as shared value and convictions, without being doomed to failure or outright refusal. Only 32 respondents considered that a museum of religion would not succeed and would instigate critique in Tunisia, unlike 268 respondents who deemed it as a suitable scheme for interreligious dialogue. This stance shows a potential open-mindedness to be acquainted with a wider religious knowledge, which is a key determinant of success for the project. However, it is important to state that this is not a full acceptance of the idea of a museum of religion but rather of a conditioned acceptance. Seven of ten of the respondents preferred that the museum tackle the Abrahamic religions. The preference for religion of the book arose from the Islamic convictions that discard a spiritual communion with ethnic religion for fear that these faiths leach into the Tunisian society. This figure reveals that a large part of the respondents accept the religious otherness but do not fully tolerate exhibiting it, which reflects a form of recognition without reconciliation called a "*structure-tolerance*".<sup>1197</sup>

Even it raises social, political, and practical concerns, providing visibility to all religions and triggering a religious dialogue between the communities remains a key component of social coexistence, which implies to dismiss any idea of exclusion.<sup>1198</sup> It is important not to exclude any confessions to maintain a critical spirit in a museum of religion. However, it is extremely complicated to display all faiths at once for a public unfamiliar with religious otherness. It is incredibly complicated to face public fear for religious otherness at one time. The openness to other religions should be done by degrees and in accordance with pedagogical methods and psychological standard. Furthermore, a key condition for success of a project is to take the pulse of the public and respond to the public's expectations and demands to guard against refusal of content. Faced with this issue, I tried through my concept to find a compromise position that

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<sup>1195</sup>Rhizome identity is a non-inherited multiple identity made up from woven relationships. The concept is inspired from the blending of the rhizome roots connected with hundreds of other roots. Deleuze & Guattari 1980, p. 20.

<sup>1196</sup>Marzolf, 1997, p. 67.

<sup>1197</sup>Zarka & Fleury 2004, p. 5.

<sup>1198</sup>Ariarajah 1999, p 23-24.

both responds to the public's wants, requiring a focus on the Abrahamic religions and completely discarding other religions. My concept sheds light on the Abrahamic religions and their crossroads with Amazigh beliefs in three exhibition storeys, which adapt audience wishes. However, it provides a storey for temporary exposure intended for exhibitions dealing with other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in a later stage. The scenario of the exhibition purposely incorporates Amazigh religious, spiritual, and liturgical practices to meet many visitors' request to throw light on this forgotten religious patrimony that has not been part of Tunisian public collection.

As shown in chapter II, most of Tunisian public collections dealing with religions tackle predominantly ancient beliefs such as Libyan, Roman, and Carthaginian religion, which make it improper to repeat a concept already existing. Even if "*Shared Holy Places*" addressed religion from a specific angle by focusing mainly on the symbolism of sacred spaces, it helped visitors imagine what a museum of religion might be like and understand that no religious sacrilege occurs in learning about other faiths. It helped visitors understand that a balanced approach on religion that displays side-by-side artifacts of different religions does not curse faiths. On the contrary, it may foster liberative understandings between individuals of different religious convictions. "*Shared Holy Places*" has proven that exhibited artifacts have not been completely isolated from their religious milieu since they acquired new interpretation levels that allowed them to move freely in another milieu. My research enabled me to conclude that there is no more need for a predominance of history and archaeology over religion in Tunisian museums and that it is possible to provide sufficient scope for the manifestation of faith without threatening the secular status of museums. There is also no need to discredit, depreciate, or distinguish beliefs to incorporate them in a museum. What matters is to place a wide range of interpretation at visitors' disposal even if these interpretations do not suit curators' beliefs and convictions. When it comes to religion, curators have to adopt the stance of the study of religion that does not require believing in a religion to be able to explore and explain it. This task needs a distanced approach that refuses ultimate reality, which Peter Berger calls a "*Methodological Atheism*"<sup>1199</sup>. There is a need of neutrality in explaining religious experience or exploring sacred objects, which is only reached through a suspension of belief. This stance represents the cornerstone of my concept of a museum of religion in terms of content and narrative.

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<sup>1199</sup> Berger, P. (1967). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, p. 20-229.

I have taken into consideration all key elements mentioned above in shaping the architectural, scenographic, and expographic design of the museum. I have paid close attention to the ethnoreligious challenge in displaying and juxtaposing religious artifacts. I studied carefully every aspect relative to a success or failure of an exposure on religion in terms of content, narrative, concordance, sacredness, ethics, and interpretative readings. I also attached great importance to the thematic repartition and driving forces that enhance visitors' perceived value in terms of ergonomic, aesthetic, mediation, and communication. As I showed in chapter 2.2.2, creating meaning starts from providing a suitable architectural plan and welcoming environment to challenge visitors' curiosity and ensure a positive impression about the narrative. The concept aimed at creating an ideal atmosphere of learning that draws on improving the communication to add clarity to religious meanings. This task started from conceiving an architectural envelope that suits religious contents and enhances the "*mediatization*" of artifacts. Through many architectural linkages between the sequences, I afforded all necessary conditions for visitors to better see and understand the narrative and dig deeper into the plurality of the religious customs, traditions, and practice.

As shown in Chapter 4.1.1, I suggested three towers and five-floor exhibition spaces connected in the middle to stress the interconnectivity, sharing, and crossing between religions. The storyline intentionally did not follow a chronological logic to avoid a separation between religions in space, time, and content or a superposition of a religion on another. The plan draws on three circular showrooms in every floor that intend providing free movement and wider viewing angle. A gangway without doors is connecting the showrooms to allow visitors have a visual escape on next sequences. An upward spiral itinerary allows a smoothly narrative succession of sequences, in which the thematic, spatial, and temporal progression is oriented to a bottom-up approach. This technique increases the suspense in each floor. Three topological relationships bond the expographic envelopes: one inserted into another (inclusion), one infiltrated in the other (partial inclusion), and one independent from the other (juxtaposition). This bond boosts the spatial experience and generates semi-symbolic couplings between the exponents. Furthermore, the spatial, visual, and sound atmospheres intentionally change in each floor to give visitors an idea of a topic shift and keep boredom at bay. The concept accords a particular importance to display and interpret artifacts using innovative ways of mediatization such as animated display boards, reconstructed scenes, and videos. The purpose behind this is creating a suitable ambience and to help visitors interpret in the best possible way meanings,

which makes the artifact both a product of a representative work and a referent.<sup>1200</sup> Moreover, it provides visitors with necessary reading keys and charges objects with an emotional, historical, cultural, spiritual, or “sacred” significance that visitors differently interpret and classify according to their conviction.

My concept focuses on promoting the intelligibility of objects’ value for all types of public and on exploring societal subjects related to religious conviction. It draws on a multifaceted approach to enhance the artifacts’ spiritual sacred values and stimulate visitors’ reflection and critical thinking. It puts great emphasis on their spiritual and social dimension of religion instead of dealing with them as historical facts. The choice of religion was not an exclusive selection but rather a pragmatic choice that prevents reusing concepts dealing with religion in more than 20 archaeological and ethnological museums. The choice corresponds to the findings of the empirical study and the surveyed expectations, which required giving more weight to modern religious observance, tradition, and customs instead of focusing solely on the ancient period. Jumping directly to blending the history of three religious communities, exploring their tradition, and reflecting their similarities and convergences will be an incorrect pedagogical step and a rushed approach. Given the unfamiliarity of a large portion of the Tunisians with Judaism and Christianity, I dedicated the first floor to provide an extensive overview of each religion, their prophets, place of establishment, organization, place of worship, and religious particularities in order to put visitors in a condition to learn more about other faiths. This area represents the unique exhibition space that deals with religions separately and devotes to each faith a particular sequence. The goal of this separation is to cause the least disturbance, inconvenience, and confusion to visitors at the start of the visit.

As shown in chapter VI, the exposure draws mainly on ritual objects but also painting, photographs, text printed on walls in Arabic and French, videos, and panels to provide an augmented reality and an immersive space. Such immersive experiences are most of the time remembered from visitors because they shape connection and emotion between the viewers and the displayed objects.<sup>1201</sup> The storyline primarily sheds light on the figure of Abraham, who represents one on the closest links between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It highlights the oriented time of the Abrahamic religions that draws on a beginning, a progress, and an expectation of an end. The storyline maintained this orientation in the itinerary of the visit and succession of sequences. Each sequence draws on six units that introduces each religion apart,

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<sup>1200</sup> Monpetit 1996, p. 59-60.

<sup>1201</sup> Bijsterveld, K., & van Dijck, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Sound souvenirs: Audio technologies, memory and cultural practices* (Vol. 2). Amsterdam University Press, p. 150-218.

its place of worship, religious symbols and significance, ritualistic and prophylactic objects, and ends up with an immersive room dedicated to the heirs of Abraham. The second floor deals with the common values and particularities of the Abrahamic religions and the importance of time in the religious experiences, in which sacredness plays a primordial role. This floor draws on three sequences that deal with the religious calendar and feast, cycle of life, and message and precepts of each religion. The scenario draws on a comparative approach that reveals both similarities and differences between religions in terms of convictions and traditions. This first sequence explores the religious calendars, holy days of worship, major religious holidays, and celebrations of revelation, ritual of purification, and feasts of gratitude in Tunisia. The second sequence gives an insight into the stage of the life cycle starting from the birth, circumcision, baptism, practices for conform food, religious majority, wedding, and ending with the funeral rites and mourning customs. An immersive room should take visitors into a virtual voyage through the major stages of religious life in each religion. The last sequence provides an overview into the message and precepts of the Abrahamic religions, starting with principles of faith, oneness of God, prayers, almsgiving, and ending with the practice of incubation and pilgrimage.

The third floor addresses the religious and imaginary dimensions of water, which is a key and substantial element in the Abrahamic religion that nourishes, purifies, blesses, and separates the pure from the impure. Based on eight units, this sequence gives a complete and thorough overview into the symbolism of water as a founding, creation, destruction, protective, blessing and key element of love and passion and delves deeper into the practice of purification and obtaining rain in each religion. It also highlights the interbreeding of the Abrahamic tradition with the ancient beliefs. The fourth floor has been conceived to host the temporary exhibitions to renew the permanent exposure and extend its scope to tackle other religions. The storyline offers a playful itinerary that stimulates all senses to engage a serene perception of artifacts, drive deep engagement in learning about the otherness, and offer more than an educational connotation. It contains various hands-on experiences such as pushing buttons, scrolling, using intuition, and testing knowledge, which promotes memorization, observation, entertainment, apprehension, and astonishment. This engagement and active involvement represents a first step to sustain interest and reach appreciation.<sup>1202</sup>

My research helped me conclude that religion is still misrepresented in Tunisian collections for religious, social, cultural, and political reasons, which are no longer valid. After the revolution, the public and politic arena changed, and the religious scene went through a series of

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<sup>1202</sup> Gardes-Tamine 2004, p 23.

transformations. Museums on the other hand did not follow this transformation and remained stagnant in a minimalist tourist approach. Learning about religion at school and exhibiting it in a museum should no longer be a taboo. This syllabus has become inevitable to upgrade schools' subjects and enhance exposure dealing with religion, broaden their contents, and add critical consciousness to ensure a better understanding of other faiths.<sup>1203</sup> Museums should draw attention to religious changes and social transformations and adapt to technological advancement to incite visitors' interest. A specific institution should assume more responsibility toward educating, inspiring, advocating, and raising awareness among audiences and offering innovative pedagogical programs to learn about religion. A museum of religion would be a positive step toward a better understanding of religion. There is no public refusal or religious infringement in creating a museum of religion and blending faiths together. This research has generated valuable working methods and instruments that help conceive a prototype of a museum based on public requirements, religious psychology, and cultural background, as well as technological advances. Tunisia should undertake such initiative to reduce the actual religious tension in the society and provide more visibility for other faiths.

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<sup>1203</sup> Interview with Néji Jalloul.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Questionnaire

All questions have been translated into Arabic.

Select one of the motivations of the museum visit.

1. Interest on art and museum
2. Interest on the artist and art works
3. A school assignment or research
4. To escape routines or for leisure
5. To spend time with friends or family
6. Culture awareness or specialized training
7. Children upbringing
8. A group visit
9. Other

With whom are you visiting the museum?

1. Friend / colleague
2. Family / relatives
3. Alone
4. Group visit
5. A member of a community
6. Other

Are you a paying visitor, a guest or are you visiting for free?

1. Charged visit
2. Guest
3. Free visit

Yearly, how often do you visit this museum?

1. <1 per year
2. 1-2 times
3. 2-4 times
4. 5-9 times
5. More than 10 times

When were you in this museum last time?

1. 1st visit
2. for 1 year
3. from 2-4 years
4. from 5-9 years
5. for more than 10 years

Are you subscribed to this museum?

1. Yes
2. Non

How interested are you in religious exposition?

1. Not at all
2. Interested
3. Very interested
4. Indifferent

### Socio-demographic questions

Gender

1. Masculine
2. Feminine.

Age:

1. < 20 years
2. 20 ~ 29 years
3. 30 ~ 39
4. 40 ~ 49
5. 50 ~ 59
6. More than 60 years.

Education Level

1. < Baccalaureate
2. Baccalaureate + 1 / + 2
3. Baccalaureate + 3 / + 4
4. more than Baccalaureate +5

Religious community

1. Jewish
2. Christian
3. Muslim
4. None

Profession:

1. Student
2. Homemaker
3. Manager or Corporate Contributors
4. Administrator
5. Office job, teachers
6. Doctor, lawyer, professor
7. Artists, journalists, religious
8. Employees
9. Others

Monthly income?

1. Less than 500
2. 500 ~ 1000    250/500 €
3. 1000 ~ 2000 ---- 500/1000 €
4. 2000 ~ 3000 ---- 1000/1500 €
5. More

How many children do you have?

1. 0
2. 1 child
3. 2 children
4. 3 children
5. more than 4 children

Perceived quality: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:

Items	1-Totally unsatisfied	2-Unsatisfied	3-Neither happy nor unhappy	4- Satisfied	5-Very satisfied
1- Atmosphere					
2 Architecture					
3-Museum signs and orientation information					
4- Exposition label					
5 -Originality of the exhibition					
6-Importance and usefulness of the permanent exposure					
7-Importance and usefulness of the temporary exposure					
8- Museum itinerary					
9- Museum facilities and service					
10- Sound system					
11- Museum comfort and ergonomics					
12- Staff's courtesy and effectiveness					
13- Light system					
14-The use of Photographs and video projection					

Perceived value: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:

Items	1-Definitely disagree	2-Disagree	3-Partly agree	4- Agree	5-Strongly agree
1- The aesthetic value and religious worth of artifacts impressed me					
2- The symbolic value of the exhibition is very meaningful					
3- The museographic concept impressed me					
4- The visit was a good combination of leisure and learning					
5- I find the building hosting the exhibition more beautiful than the exhibition itself					
6- The visit is definitely worth the price of admission					
7- The admission prices of the museum was convenient					
8- The visit was for me an opportunity to develop a new knowledge about religion					
9- I will recommend the exposition to my relatives					

Visitors' Satisfaction and Concept's Acceptance: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:

Items	1-Very mediocre	2-Mediocre	3-Middling	4-good	5-Very good
1- According to your expectation, how do you rate the museum's architecture?					
2- According to your expectation, how do you rate museum's facilities?					
3- According to your expectation, how do you rate human mediation?					
4 -According to your expectation, how do you rate the concept of the exhibition?					
5- According to your expectation, how do you rate the core message of the exposure?					
6- According to your expectation, how do you rate the coherence of the exhibition?					
7- During the visit, how do you rate the orientation within the visit?					
8- How do you rate your overall satisfaction?					

Employed Approach and its Impact on Building Loyalty: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:

Items	1- Definitely disagree	2- Disagree	3 -Partly agree	4- Agree	5-Strongly agree
1- The concept was appealing					
2- I will positively advertise to visit the museum					
3- I recommend this exhibition to deepen religious knowledge					
4- The religious exhibition has been a vital part of the visit					
5- I feel represented by this exhibition					
6- I want to subscribe this museum					

Museum of Religion is an Effective Solution to Develop Visitors' Religious Knowledge: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:

Items	1-Not at all	2-Probably not	3-Probably	4-Quite likely	5-Certainly
1- Do you think that Tunisian museums are close to the public?					
2- Do you think that it is possible for everyone to visit a museum?					
3- Do you think that a museum of religion in Tunisia will be a good way to improve knowledge about religion?					
4- Do you think that students and schoolchildren are regularly visiting museums?					
5- Do you think that Tunisian museums and educational institutions are cooperating to provide information about religion?					
6- Do you think that Tunisian museums represent social learning spaces for cultural and religious knowledge?					

**Immaterial Religious Heritage and Objects' Sacredness in Museums: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:**

Items	1-Very mediocre	2-Mediocre	3-Middling	4-good	5-Very good
1- How do you rate the consistency of religious collections in Tunisian museums?					
2- How do you rate the priority given to display immaterial religious heritage in Tunisian museums?					
3- How do you rate your interaction with the religious objects in the exhibition?					
4- How do you rate the work done to highlight objects' symbolism and sacredness in the exhibition?					
5- How do you rate the standpoint used in " <i>Shared Holy Places</i> " in terms of dealing with religious matters?					
6- How do you rate the importance of the immaterial religious heritage in the country's patrimony?					
7- How do you rate the displaying of others' beliefs in Tunisian museums?					

**The Feasibility and Chance of Success of a Museum of Religion in Tunisia: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:**

Items	1-Not at all	2-Probably not	3-Probably	4-Quite likely	5-Certainly
1- Do you think that a museum of religions will be a suitable scheme for an interreligious dialogue in Tunisia?					
2- Do you think that a museum of religion will be a successful initiative?					
3- Do you think there is a similar project in another country?					
4- Does Tunisian religious tangible and intangible heritages require such a project?					
5- Do you think that religion is a taboo topic in Tunisia?					
6- Do you think it is better to display only the common religions in Tunisia?					
7- Do you think it is better to display all world's religions as does the museum of religion in Canada?					

**Religious Coexistence and Degree of Tolerance in Regard to Religious Minorities: place a checkmark (✓) beside your answer:**

Items	1-Not at all	2-Probably not	3-Probably	4-Quite likely	5-Certainly
1- Do you think you are a tolerant person with regard to religious belonging?					
2- Do you think Tunisians are generally tolerant with respect to religious minorities?					
3- Do you think that religious minorities are an essential value in Tunisian culture?					
4- Do you have friends or relatives belonging to another religious faith?					
5- Do you tolerate religious conversion?					

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<b>6- Do you think that religious minorities pose a threat to the Muslim identity in Tunisia?</b>					
<b>7- Do you think that members of religious minorities have the right to access the policy in Tunisia?</b>					

**Do you have any comments, suggestions, remarks, perspective or critics in regards to the conception of a museum for religion in Tunisia?**

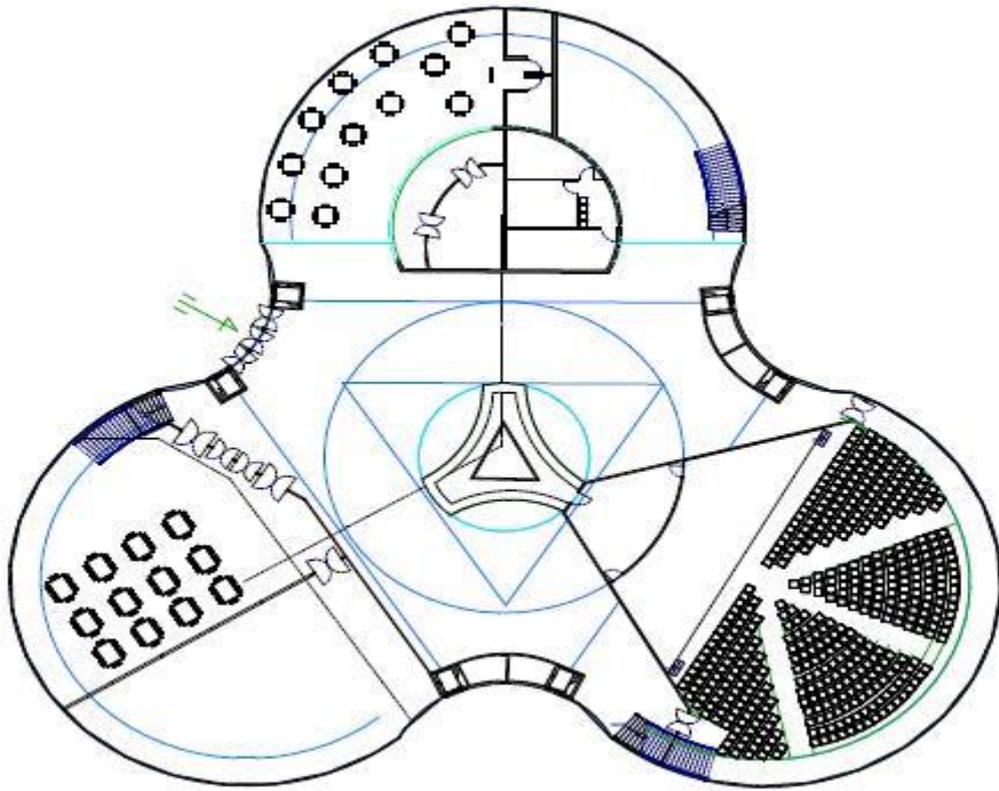
## Appendix B: Interviews

The interviewees / Contact details	Main occupation	Discussed topics
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Prof. Dr. Neji Jalloul</b></p> <p>Ministry of Education, 61 Boulevard Bab Bnet, Tunis 1030, Tunisia</p> <p>Email:n.jalloul@hotmail.fr</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tunisian Minister of Education since February 6, 2015.</li> <li>-University professor of archeology and founding member of the National Commission for Military History</li> <li>- Tunisian historian, Islamologist and politician.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Public’s misconception and unfamiliarity with other religions and cultures</li> <li>-State’s lack of investment in mentoring youth in museums through field trips</li> <li>-State’s responsibility for giving museums an elitist aspect in collective imagination and for provoking disinterest in religious exposures</li> <li>- Awareness raising and education for religious tolerance</li> <li>- The establishment of a substantial educational and cultural program based on inclusive spirit and balanced focus on religion</li> <li>-The effectiveness of a museum of religion in promoting openness and breaking through the fear of religion</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Prof. Dr. Ahlem Boussada</b></p> <p>Faculty of Literature, Arts and Humanities of Manouba, Campus Universitaire de la Manouba, 2010, Tunisia</p> <p>Email: ahlem-Boussada@gmail.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University professor of Museology and Scenography</li> <li>-Tunisian scenographer</li> <li>- Researcher at the Manouba University Heritage Laboratory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The importance of the scenography in exhibitions dealing with religions</li> <li>- The significance of dramaturgy and choreography in conceiving religious exposures</li> <li>-The museological requirements of displaying religious artifacts</li> <li>-The assessment of exposure “Shared holy Places”</li> </ul>

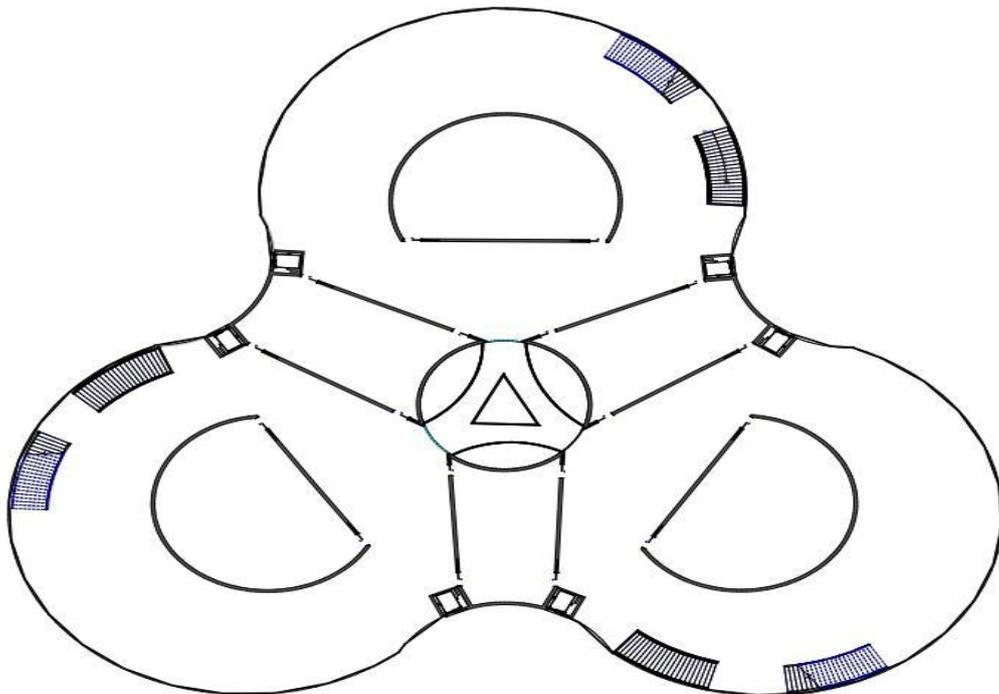
<p><b>Dr. Nejib Ben Lazreg</b> Institut National du Patrimoine 4, Place du château, 1008, Tunis, Tunisia Email: nbl@gnet.tn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Researcher at the Institut National du Patrimoine, Tunis</li> <li>- Curator of Salakta archaeological Museum since 1983.</li> <li>- Curator of Lamta Museum since 1992</li> <li>- Curator of the Roman sites in the Sahel region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The archaeological and aesthetic approach used in Tunisian museums</li> <li>- The explanatory causes for not taking a comprehensive approach to religious heritage in Tunisian museums</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dr. Lotfi rahmouni</b> Institute of Tourist Studies of Sidi Dhrif, Av. Sidi Bennour, Site archéologique de Carthage. Tel:71 562 016 / 98 555 780</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Univeristy professor of archeology</li> <li>-Director of Higher Institute of Tourist Studies of Sidi Dhrif</li> <li>-Sworn interpreter</li> <li>-Documentary producer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The censorship of religious terms foreign to Islam in Tv documentaries on the history of Tunisia</li> <li>- Common misconception that it is not necessary to visit museums to discover the country's heritage</li> <li>- Museums pure historic and archaeological product</li> </ul>
<p><b>Manoël Penicaud</b> Institute of Mediterranean European and Comparative Ethnology 7307 Mediterranean House of Humanities (MMSH) 5, rue du Château de l'Horloge, BP 647, 13094, Aix-en-Provence cedex 2, France Email:manoel.penicaud@cnrs.fr</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Anthropologist</li> <li>-Junior Research Fellow (CRCN), IDEMEC, CNRS, Aix-en-Provence since 2015</li> <li>- Curator, Shared Sacred Sites , Marseille, Tunis, Thessaloniki, Paris, NYC, Istanbul</li> <li>- Post-doctoral fellow, CRFJ, MAE-CNRS, Jerusalem, Israel</li> <li>-Post-doctoral fellow, LabexMed/Mucem, Marseille</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The juxtaposition of religious materials in the new museology.</li> <li>-The challenges of materializing religious tradition, ritual, or way of thinking.</li> <li>-The issue of sacredness in museums dealing with religions</li> <li>- The interpretations of religious objects and tradions</li> <li>-The work conditions in Bardo museum</li> </ul>
<p><b>Slim Bouzghenda</b> Rue de La Medina Yasmine Hammamet 8050 Tunisia Email: slim.bouzguenda@medina.com.tn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Head of the museum of religion and civilization of Hammamet</li> <li>- Iberostar - Marketing Analyst</li> <li>- Marketing Manager of Medina Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The purpose of creating the museum of religion and civilizations of Hammamet</li> <li>- The museological challenges that met the curator of the exposure</li> <li>- The importance of the donations from religious communities and personal contributions</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Daniel Cohen</b></p> <p>Bessis Synagogue Rue Khaznadar, La Goulette 23 Rue de Palestine Tunis, Tunisia</p>	<p>-Rabbi of Bet Mordechai Synagogue, La Goulette -Religious education teacher at Hatbat school in Tunis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The sensitivity on displaying religious objects belonging to different religions together</li> <li>- The importance of showing respect for the religious convictions in their singularities and that a difference does not mean a complete separation</li> <li>- Finding an acceptable compromise between curators and religious authorities to ensure respect for sacred objects and symbols</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Guillaume Bruté de Rémur</b></p> <p>Baabda District, Mount Lebanon Governorate, Lebanon Email: gbrute@gmail.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diocesan priest</li> <li>-Presbyter responsible for the traveling team of the Neocatechumenal Path in Tunisia</li> <li>- Rector of the International Interritual Parochial Seminary Redemptoris Mater of Lebanon since October 1999</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The challenges of displaying religious objects belonging to different religions together</li> <li>- The importance of using a cautious and well-thought approach in a museum of religion and of keeping each religion its specificities and particularities</li> <li>- Countering prejudices, stereotypes, and religious condescension in a museum of religion without changing facts.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ezzedine Daly</b></p> <p>Brahmia mosque, rue union Maghreb arabe, Sidi Bouzid 9100 Email: Dalyez@hotmail.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Tunisian Imam in Brahmia Mosque since 2015</li> <li>- Islamic preacher in Sidi bouzid</li> <li>- Researcher at Tablighi Jamaat organization in north Africa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The sensitivity on displaying religious objects belonging to different religions together</li> <li>-The infringement of sacredness in Islam</li> <li>-The use of religious artifacts for cultural purposes</li> </ul>

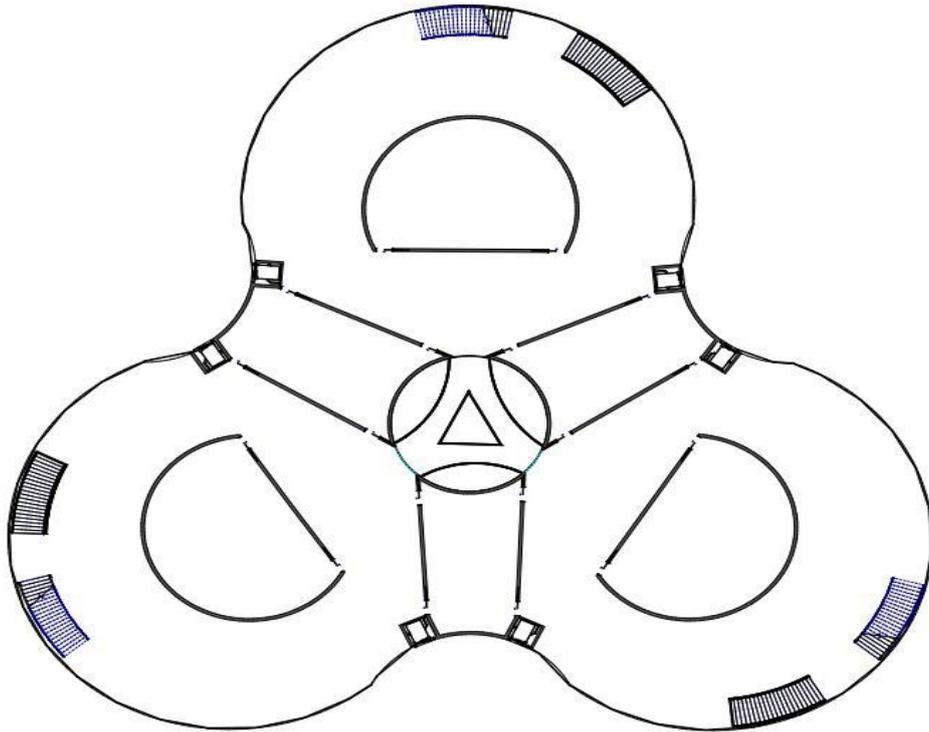
Appendix C: Architectural plans of the museum



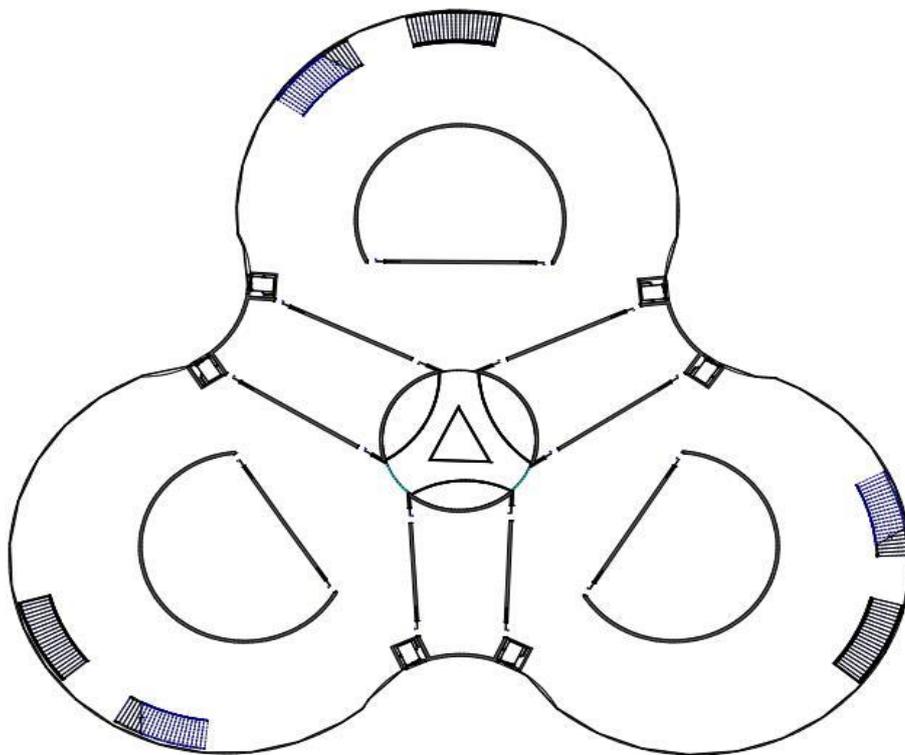
Ground Floor



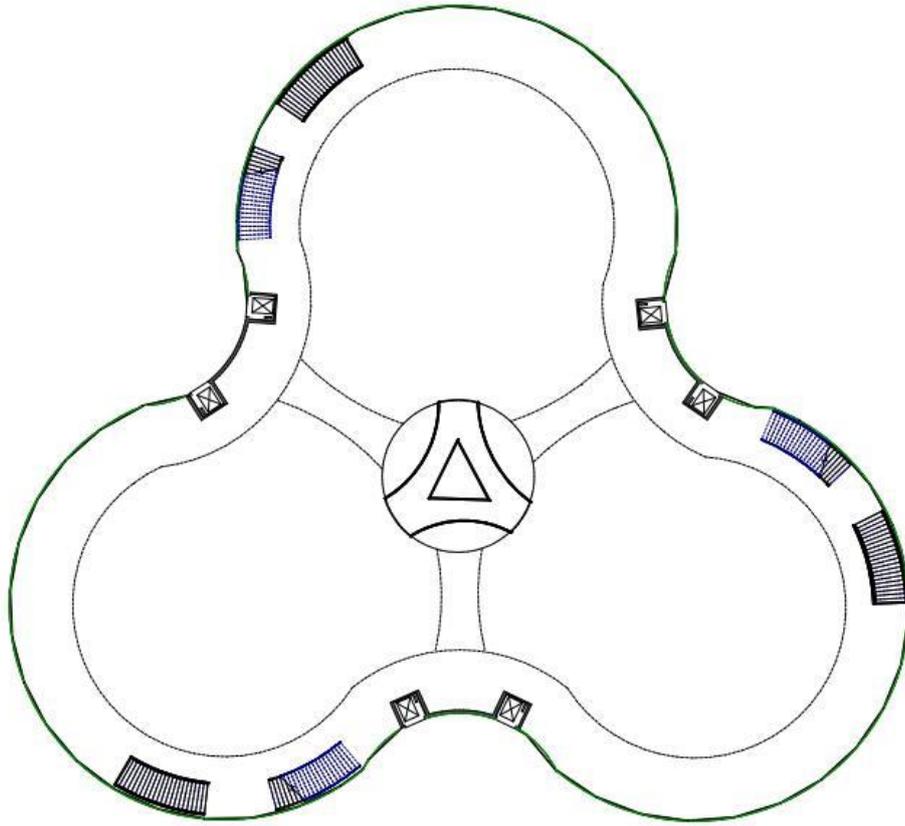
First Floor



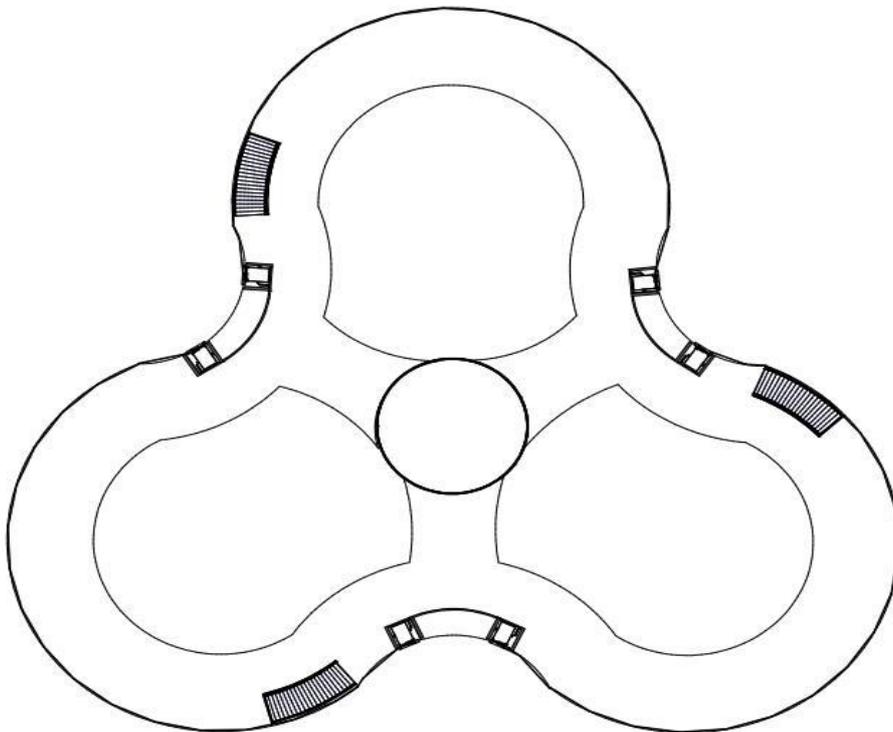
**Second Floor**



**Third Floor**



**Fourth Floor**



**Fifth Floor**