

The Pilgrimage to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem

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Abstract

The regions of Tuat, Gurara, and Tidikelt in the South of Algeria celebrate tens of yearly religious celebrations known locally as *Ziyarat*. It is the plural of the Arabic word *Ziyara*, which means “a visit.” This paper sheds light on one of the most important of these *Ziyarat*, the pilgrimage to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. This sacred journey is also commonly known as *Es’bua* which was derived from the Arabic word *us’bua* that means “a week.” It traces the phases through which pilgrims begin a sacred journey from Tabelkoza to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem and focuses on their religious and secular rituals. This celebration coincides with the seventh day after the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), that is, the 19th *Rabi-ul-awwal* in the lunar calendar. Pilgrims walk about 50 miles from Tabelkoza to Zawyet Sid al-Haj Belqacem in the course of seven days, during which they rest at five sacred places: Sammuta, Kali, Ulad Said, Massine, and Zawyet Sid al-Haj Belqacem. The final location represents the culmination of the previous phases and the closing of a cycle that began a week before. Pilgrims and visitors from neighboring and remote areas meet in a huge hollow area locally called *al-Hufra* at the entrance of Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem to wait for the most exciting moment in this celebration when representatives of saints hoist their flags and try to get into *al-Hufra*. They then leave as quickly as possible without being knocked down by the crowd who is determined to get pieces of cloth from the flags that are believed to be *al-Baraka* (something that brings good luck and protects from evil). After that, all the people lie down on the ground for a few seconds as a sign of respect to the saints. Then, they begin throwing money which will be collected by the disciples of Sid al-Haj Belqacem after the people leave the premises. *Es’bua* ends with *el Fat’ha* where everyone expresses their wishes and leave *al-Hufra* wishing long lives and good things for each other until the next celebration.

Given its importance, the pilgrimage to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO in 2015. These *Ziyarat* to saints are of great spiritual importance to the local people; however, the Salafists strongly reject them and see them as innovations which go against the true faith of Islam.

Keywords: Ziyarat, Es’bua, Al-Baraka, Gurara, South of Algeria, Saints, pilgrims, Zawyet Sid al-Haj Belqacem

Introduction

The region of Gurara in the South of Algeria celebrates tens of yearly religious events locally known as *Ziyarat*. Almost every *Q'sar* (village) has at least one saint to whom the inhabitants organize a *Ziyara*, an Arabic word that means “a visit.” This paper sheds light on one of the most important of these *Ziyarat* which is *Es'bu'a*¹, a word derived from the Arabic word *us'bu'a*, which means “a week.” It also means “the seventh day” and is traditionally an occasion to celebrate the seventh day of birth where relatives, neighbors, and friends are invited to a ceremony. This often includes religious activities such as reciting the Holy Qur'an and spiritual chants like *al-Yaquta* (the Hyacinth), one of the rituals of the Shaykhia brotherhood, or *al-Busayri*, a poem to praise Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)². However, in the region of Gurara, the term is tightly linked to the celebration of the seventh day of birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

This paper attempts to trace the phases through which pilgrims begin a sacred journey from Tabelkoza to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, focusing on the religious and secular rituals included in this journey. This celebration coincides with the seventh day after the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), that is, the 19th *Rabi-ul-Awwal* in the third month of the lunar calendar. Pilgrims cross about 50 miles southward from Tabelkoza and northward from Ajdir and Ulad Issa in the course of seven days, during which they rest at a number of villages to perform secular and religious rituals. They arrive at the final location, Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, in the afternoon of the seventh day. The final location represents the culmination of the previous phases and the closing of a cycle that began a week before. Anthropologists consider *S'bu'a* as the most important religious event ever celebrated in the region of Gurara because of the number of spiritual and secular activities it constitutes and the crowds of pilgrims and visitors it attracts every year. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born on a Monday, 12th *Rabi-ul-Awwal*, and the celebration of *S'bu'a* takes place on the seventh day, on the 19th of the month. However, the festivities begin on the first day of the month of *Rabi-ul-Awwal* and end two days after the grandiose closing ceremony on the seventh day of His birth anniversary. The evenings of the first eleven days are marked by religious rituals which are mainly recitation of poems praising Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The most common poems are *al-*

¹ “S'bu'a” is the English spelling, sometimes the French spelling “Sbou'a” is used when referring to French texts. The same for the region of Gurara, its French Spelling is Gourara.

² PBUH is the abbreviation of Peace Be Upon Him.

Hamaziya by *al-Bussayri* and *Takhmisat al-Baghdadi*. On the eve of 12th *Rabi-ul-Awwal*, people spend the whole night in mosques, collectively reciting the Holy Qur'an and poems praising the Prophet. These spiritual rituals end in the morning with a closing ceremony called *al-Fat'ha*. After this ceremony, the seven-day sacred journey from several villages in the Gurara to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem begins. Due to the importance of the event, it has recently been added to the list of World Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO. Finally, it is important to mention that the primary reference used to accomplish this research is a documentary film directed by Fethi Benharzallah (2015) which illustrates the different stations on the course of this sacred journey.

The Origin of the Celebration of S'bu

The Prophet (upon him prayer and salvation) appeared in a dream to Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. He stared at him and said, "You will celebrate the seventh day of my birth, you shall give a pound and a half of wheat that you should grind to prepare a meal to which you invite all the saints, chiefs, and notables of Gurara. If this meal suffices all the guests and it will, know that I am the 'Mustapha' (Prophet). If it does not, be careful! In this case, I am not the Prophet, but the devil." Sidi al-Haj Belqacem called Abu Shamiya from u-Ghazi and Sidi al-Haj bu-M'hamad of Tabelkoza to tell them about the story. Sidi Ahmad U Yussuf u-El Barka (Massin) heard about the story and asked Sidi al-Haj Belqacem to attend this meeting. Sidi al-Haj Belqacem said, "My descendants and those of Sidi al-Haj bu-M'hamad will meet you." This is why the station of Macin at the mausoleum of Sidi Ahmed U Yussuf is so important in the course of this sacred journey. Sidi al-Haj Belqacem received his guests and gave them food, which was sufficient for all, then he made sure that he saw the Prophet in his dream and decided to celebrate the anniversary on the seventh day of His birth. All the guests agreed and since then, the region of Gurara has been celebrating this event (Bellil, 2003).

The original text of this story exists in the oral tradition in Zenete, the language spoken by the locals in Gurara. It was translated into French by Bellil, story number 13: *Asbā'i, manek ibda*, in French, *l'origine du S'boua*, which means the origin of *S'bu* (Bellil, 2006). A similar version is introduced by A. Djouli in his book "Le S'boua de Timimoun, Louanges *et Etendards*" on which he relies on a manuscript found in Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem (Djouli, 2011).

Day One: Rabi-ul-Awwal 12th

In the afternoon of the 12th day, pilgrims and visitors march to Buyahya, a small village two kilometers to the south of Timimoun, to visit the shrine of Lalla Hijja Rahim, the wife of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. Near the shrine, people dance to

the rhythm of drums using sticks cut from date palm trees in the premises. It is widely believed that these sticks, thanks to the blessings of Lalla Hijja Rahim, can cure fever. They also perform *al-Hadra*, repeating invocations of praise and glorification of Allah and his Prophet until the approach of sunset.

Day Two: *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 13th

On the northern side of Timimoun, the capital of the region of Gurara, at about 80 kilometers, the first pilgrims start the sacred journey from the mausoleum of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamed; in Tamsloht, Tabelkoza to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, which is around 5 kilometers to the south-west of Timimoun. The journey lasts six days and stops at different villages and sacred places where pilgrims comprising mainly of disciples of Sid al-Haj Bu M'hamed holding the flag of Sidi al-Haj Bulghit (one of the seven sons of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamed and a disciple of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem) are joined by other pilgrims throughout the six-day journey, making the procession bigger. The representative of each saint from the villages in the course of the sacred journey join the procession with large flags symbolizing their saints.

The first station where the procession stops is the shrine of Sidi Ben Dawud, a servant of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamed. According to the oral tradition, the latter was asked by the saints of Iguzzulen (See the map) together with Sidi Musa wal Messaud to leave the premises to establish their own zawiya somewhere else. He went northward until he reached a location called Zawyet Debbagh. The saint of this zawiya, Sidi Muhammad Debbagh, offered him a slave called Dawud and asked him to resume his trip northward until sunset. There, he established his zawiya in a location called Tamsloht in Tabelkoza. Because of his great esteem and servitude to his Master, the slave Dawud became a saint and won the title *Sidi*, which means "Sir." When he died, he was buried at the location where he used to worship and supplicate God; and ever since the celebration of S'bu'a al-Mawlid began in the early sixteenth century, pilgrims on their way from Tabelkoza to Ta'Antas mark a short stay at his shrine to recite *Surah al-Fat'ha*.

The second station in the sacred journey is Ta'Antas, around six kilometers from Tabelkoza. The inhabitants of the village come out to welcome the delegates in an atmosphere of joy and happiness. They perform some rituals, particularly *al-Hadra*, and recite *Surah al-Fat'ha* at the mausoleum of Sidi Moulay Abdul'Qader al-Jilani who is a prominent Sufi figure buried in Baghdad. The disciples of the Sufi brotherhood al-Qadiryia built him shrines wherever there are members of this brotherhood. The delegates resume their journey to Tiji in Zawyet Debbagh. Once again, the inhabitants welcome the delegates and they all dance together to the rhythm of a tambourine in *al-Hadra*, praising Allah and His Messenger. This ritual marks the end of the first day, and all the pilgrims spend the night at Zawyet Sidi al-Haj M'hamad Boulghiti.

Day Three: *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 14th

In the morning of the third day, pilgrims leave Tiji for Benzita (See the map) where they take a short break to drink tea. This short stay is of great importance to the inhabitants because they believe that the blessings of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamad bring them good things. Then, the delegates resume the journey to Wadghagh, a small village that's a short distance from Benzita. Pilgrims are welcomed at the al-Barrani mosque where they rest for a while to close the meeting with *al-Fat'ha*, a spiritual ceremony of invocations and praise to God. It is worth noting that passing through these villages on the course of this sacred journey brings deep meanings because it stresses on strengthening friendly relationships amongst the different clans and tribes in Gurara and generates the values of tolerance and love among them. It is also important to mention the generosity of the people of Gurara; all pilgrims and visitors are provided with free food and accommodation during the whole sacred journey. The event is also an opportunity for seniors and notables to exchange ideas and to meet and discuss issues of common interest. By eleven o'clock, the delegates leave Wadghagh for al-Haj Guelman which is thirty kilometers away. After the lunch break and the prayers of *Dohr* and *Asr*, they leave for Sammuta — eight kilometers from al-Haj Gueman — where they spend the night of the third day.

Day Four: *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 15th

In the morning of the fourth day, pilgrims leave Sammuta for Tiliwin to visit the shrine of Sidi Abdullah. When they arrive in Tiliwin, they march to the square of the village where the inhabitants await them. They stand in two opposite rows before starting the greeting ritual called *t'chwq*. After a short break to drink tea, they visit the shrine of Sidi Abdallah where they recite some verses from the Holy Qur'an and finish with the ceremony of *al-Fat'ha*. Then, the pilgrims go back to al-Haj Guelman where they are welcomed by a crowd of people. After the greeting rituals, they dance *al-Hadra* to the rhythm of a tambourine and close the welcome ceremony with *al-Fat'ha*. Pilgrims resume the sacred journey to Zawyet Iguzzulen in Ulad Said, which is seven kilometers to the southwest of al-Haj Guelman. At that moment, the descendants of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamad begin the ritual of *al'lbas*, an Arabic word which means "the dressing." They change the cloth that covers the tomb of Sidi Ahmad ben Bubkr, who is the father of Sidi al-Haj bu M'hamad, the saint of Tabelkoza. The old cloth is torn into pieces to be given to pilgrims and visitors because they believe it is *al-Baraka*. After they close the ritual of *al'lbas* with the ceremony of *al-Fat'ha*, they all go to the outskirts of the village to welcome the pilgrims coming from al-Haj Guelman. The delegates are received with all the honors, and the meeting reflects great moments of high spirituality. It symbolizes a meeting between the father, Sidi Ahmad ben Bubkr, and the son, Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamad (Moussaoui, 2002). After they perform the prayer of *al-Maghrib* collectively, they move to the mausoleum

of Sidi Ahmad ben Bubkr where they recite *Surah al-Fat'ha*, which ends with long moments of invocation and praise to God and His Messenger. The last ritual which marks the fourth day is *al-Hadra*. Pilgrims and visitors, in a circle form, dance to the rhythm of a tambourine around the flags of Zawyet Iguzzulen and the flag of Sidi al-Haj Bulghit that represents Zawyet Tamsloht in Tabelkoza, in an atmosphere of joy and satisfaction from the meeting.

Day Five: *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 16th

In the morning of the fifth day, pilgrims march to the old cemetery in Ulad Said to visit the tombs of the relatives of Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamad. After that, they leave for Ulad Harun where they are warmly welcomed by its inhabitants. After a ceremony of invocation and supplication, pilgrims bid farewell. The next station in this sacred journey is Kali — three kilometers from Ulad Harun. The delegates of pilgrims and visitors come to see the mausoleum of Sidi al-Haj Lahcen where they then perform some rituals such as *al-Hadra*, reciting the Holy Qur'an, etc.

On the southern part of Gurara, delegates from the villages of Ajdir and Ulad Issa start the sacred journey to *al-Hufra* in Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem (See the map). On their way, the two delegates meet at the mausoleum of Sidi Abbad, which is between Aguntur and Tafawt, where they combine to form a single group representing Sidi Abbad.³ After the long march, the delegates arrive in Zawyet Awsif where they are welcomed by the inhabitants of Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. They then begin by visiting the ruins of the old part of Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem where the father of the latter, Shaykh al-Husseyyn, lived six centuries ago; and there, the flag representing Sidi Abbad spends the night before they enter *al-Hufra* on the next day.

On the northern side of Gurara, the delegates of Anjellu representing Ulad Ayyash from Ksar Qaddur (See the map) hold the flag of Sidi Abdullah, the son-in-law of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem (Djaafri, 2011), and start their march to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem.

Day Six: *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 17th

In the evening of *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 17th, an important meeting takes place in Macin, a small village five kilometers north of Timimoun. Delegates coming from the north and the south meet at the mausoleum of Sidi Ahmed U Yussuf, a disciple of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, who expressed his will to take part in the meeting called upon by Sidi al-Haj Belqacem and Sidi al-Haj Bu M'hamad. After the prayer of *Isha*, the moon rises and begins to spread its clarity around the area. Visi-

³ Saint Sidi Abbad is one the most faithful disciples of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem who devoted his life to the servitude of his master.

tors and pilgrims live exciting moments when the flags of the two saints meet near the mausoleum of Sidi Ahmed U Yussuf in an atmosphere of exaltation. A large number of people circle around the flags, shoulder against shoulder, hand in hand, swaying their bodies back and forth to the rhythm of a tambourine, repeatedly praising and glorifying God in grace and perfect harmony. On the other side of the village, in the mosque, disciples recite the whole Holy Qur'an in a ritual called *es-Selka*. This ritual begins after the prayer of *Asr* and ends in the morning of the next day after the prayer of *al-Fajr* (dawn) by the ceremony of *al-Fat'ha*. Disciples live great moment of high spirituality, with their hands high to the sky in an atmosphere of meditation and invocation.

Day Seven: Rabi-ul-Awwal 18th

On the seventh day of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), on *Rabi-ul-Awwal* 18th in the lunar calendar, all delegates leave to Timimoun where they all have lunch except the delegate holding the flag of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. This continues until Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, as the flag takes its position with the other flags representing the southern part of Gurara in a place called *Dekkan't el-Eulma* (the platform of the flags). After the lunch break, all the delegates representing the saints of Timimoun, together with those representing the saints of Awgrut (an important oasis seventy kilometers to the south) come out from the mausoleum of Sidi Ahmed U Uthman to the meeting of *J'bel* (the mountain). Delegates, pilgrims, and visitors march along the main street in Timimoun, passing by the mausoleum of Sidi l'Husseyn which is located at the heart of the city. The inhabitants come out of their houses to provide pilgrims and visitors with dates, milk, water, and bread (Ouagouag-Kezzal, 1978).

According to the oral tradition, the station of *J'bel* was not included in the course of this sacred journey when it was established by Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. It was introduced after his death to gather conflicting clans and tribes for reconciliation. A large crowd of people arrives at *J'bel* after the prayer of *Dohr* to follow a number of religious and secular rituals, including an equestrian parade, *al-Hadra*, and *al-Barud*, a folkloric dance performed by a team composed of thirty or more players with rifles, forming a circle around a chief accompanied by four or five drummers. The word *Barud* refers to the explosive black powder with which players fill in their rifles. The game derives its name from *al-Barud* because the most important feature in the game is the strong sound made by the players when they all fire at once. The dance follows a rhythm made by the drummers and the players who strike the ground with their feet with their rifles in hand and their fingers on the trigger as they carefully watch the movements and signals of the chief. Suddenly, the chief gives a stealthy and quick signal and all the teams fire at once, making a strong sound locally known as *al-Qars*. The rest sings about how skillful and experienced the team is. If the sound comes out as a single shot, it means that the team is highly skilled. The different activities end

with a closing ceremony marked by great moments of supplication and invocation. Then, the crowd marches to *al-Hufra* in Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem which is the final stage of this sacred journey. *Al-Hufra* is an Arabic word which means “the hole,” but it actually refers to a sacred hollow area of less than a hectare surface.

After the prayer of *al-Asr*, all the pilgrims and visitors take their places in *al-Hufra*, which looks like the stadium bleachers, and wait for the most exciting moment of the whole celebration. The delegates holding the flags that represent the saints of Timimoun begin a slow move towards *al-Hufra* from the north-west side, while the delegates that represent the saints of Tabelkoza come from the north-east side. The delegates of Ajdir, Ulad Issa, and Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem come from the south-west side. All the delegates march towards *al-Hufra* in synchronized movements to the rhythm of *al-Hadra*. The groups of pilgrims and visitors around the delegates holding the flags move from three different directions toward the heart of the arena repeating the invocation: "*Ya Rassul Allah, Ya Rassul Allah*" ("O Messenger of God, O Messenger of God") in a circle, swinging back and forth. During that moment, visitors begin throwing pieces of money towards the center of *al-Hufra* which will be collected by the disciples of Sid el Haj Belqacem after people have left the premises.

The most exciting moment is imminent and everyone is ready for the moment of the flags' hugging. It happens as if some people have not seen each other for a year. The arena is filled with a huge crowd and it suddenly becomes narrow and too small to contain all the people who are out of breath and overcome by the desire to observe the single detail and to see the blessing. When the distance between the delegates becomes short, the flags representing the saints of Gurara rush into the heart of *al-Hufra* to hug each other in an atmosphere of extreme excitement. The crowd launches a cry of joy, "*Tlagaw al Hamdulillah*" which means, "They met! Praise be to God" (See the picture below). Then, the delegates holding the flags of the saints immediately speed to join the mausoleum of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem to avoid being caught in the crowd. Pilgrims and visitors then try to get a piece of cloth from the flags in which they believe to be *al-Baraka* (something that brings blessings, good luck, and protects from evil).



Figure 1. The Moment of Meeting

Then, all those who are present lay down with their backs against the ground as a sign of respect and devotion to the saints; thanks are given to God for their union. The rituals end with a congregational closing ceremony of high spirituality where people raise their hands high toward the sky in an atmosphere of meditation. Invocations and prayers supplicating Allah by means of His Prophet to bless the community are conducted to bring peace and prosperity and to protect believers. Pilgrims and visitors start to leave *al-Hufra*, wishing long lives and good things to each other until the next celebration. In a matter of minutes, the crowd spreads in all directions like impetuous water absorbed by a dry land. It is important to note that these *Ziyarat* (visits or pilgrimage) to saints are of great spiritual importance to the local people; however, the Salafists strongly reject them and see them as innovations which go against the true faith of Islam.

In addition to its spiritual effect on pilgrims, *S'bu*a has an economic impact on Gurara. Every year, a two-week fair opens by the second week of *Rabi ul-Awwal* and lasts until the end of the celebration of *S'bu*a. Traders from different parts of the country bring their goods to be exchanged for other goods or to be sold to the local people and visitors. It is really a lucrative opportunity especially with the significant number of people who save throughout the year to buy their needs in this fair. Socially, the event is a good opportunity for meetings between families and establishing friendly relationships with and between visitors coming from different regions. The event is also an occasion to settle conflicts within and between families, clans, and tribes.

***S'bu*a: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

In conformity with the five criteria defined by the UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in its 32nd

Session held in Paris from September 29 to October 17, 2003 (Anon, 2017) and the Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee, 10.COM.10.b.2, Windhoek, Namibia, Tenth Session from November 30 to December 4, 2015, the Committee took note that Algeria has nominated S’bua, annual pilgrimage to the Zawiya of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem in Gurara (No 00667), for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. After deliberation, the Committee decides that from the information included in the file, the nomination satisfies the five criteria, and therefore inscribes S’bua, annual pilgrimage to the Zawiya of Sidi al-Haj Belqacem, on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2015).



S’bua includes festive events such as *al-Hadra*, *al-Barud*, equestrian parades, rites and beliefs such as *es-Selka*, and different rituals performed at the shrines and mausoleums on the course of the sacred journey to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. This cultural element also allows thousands of pilgrims and visitors to meet and share food and shelter, which generate feelings of equality, friendship, and tolerance. This goes in conformity with the principles of the United Nations. In addition, since its establishment at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the annual celebration of *S’bua* has been an important meeting to settle conflicts and conclude treaties of peace between conflicting tribes. This again fits the principles of the United Nations advocating the values of tolerance, peace, and the acceptance of the other.

Conclusion

The celebration of *S’bua al-Mawlid en-Nabawi e-Sharif* is the most important religious event celebrated in the region of Gurara in the south of Algeria after the two feasts: the feast of *al-Fitr* which comes after Ramadhan and the feast of sacrifice *al-Ad’ha* which comes in the 10th Dhul Hijja, the twelfth month

in the Hegira calendar. One of the striking things which may be noted is that despite the impressive number of pilgrims and visitors, no single significant incident has been recorded during all the previous editions of the event since it was first initiated at the beginning of the tenth century H.A. (around the second half of the sixteenth century A.D). According to A. Djouli in his book '*Le S'boua de Timimoun – Louanges et Etendards*', when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) appeared to Sidi al-Haj Belqacem in his dream after he accepted the anniversary of the seventh day of birth, he asked for mercy for himself, his children, for the disciples of Zawya, and for all who attend *S'bu*a. He also asked for protection and security for all the pilgrims and visitors. It is also worth noting that the event is an opportunity to purify souls through the spiritual rituals and to renew faith and love of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Aside from that, the event is also an opportunity for reconciliation between conflicting families, clans, and tribes, and a reminder of the values of fraternity, peace, and tolerance. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Salafists strongly reject some of the beliefs related to the event such as believing *al-Baraka* in the pieces of cloth taken from the flags of the saints or in the virtue of the sticks cut from palm trees used by the dancers of *al-Hadra*, the day of Lalla Hijja Rahim, to cure fever. Moreover, the Salafists deny that the origin of this celebration is upon a request from the Prophet himself to Sidi al-Haj Belqacem. These deeds and beliefs are seen as innovation and against the true faith of Islam. Nevertheless, *S'bu*a remains a very popular event in Gurara that the local people, pilgrims, and visitors look forward to every year.

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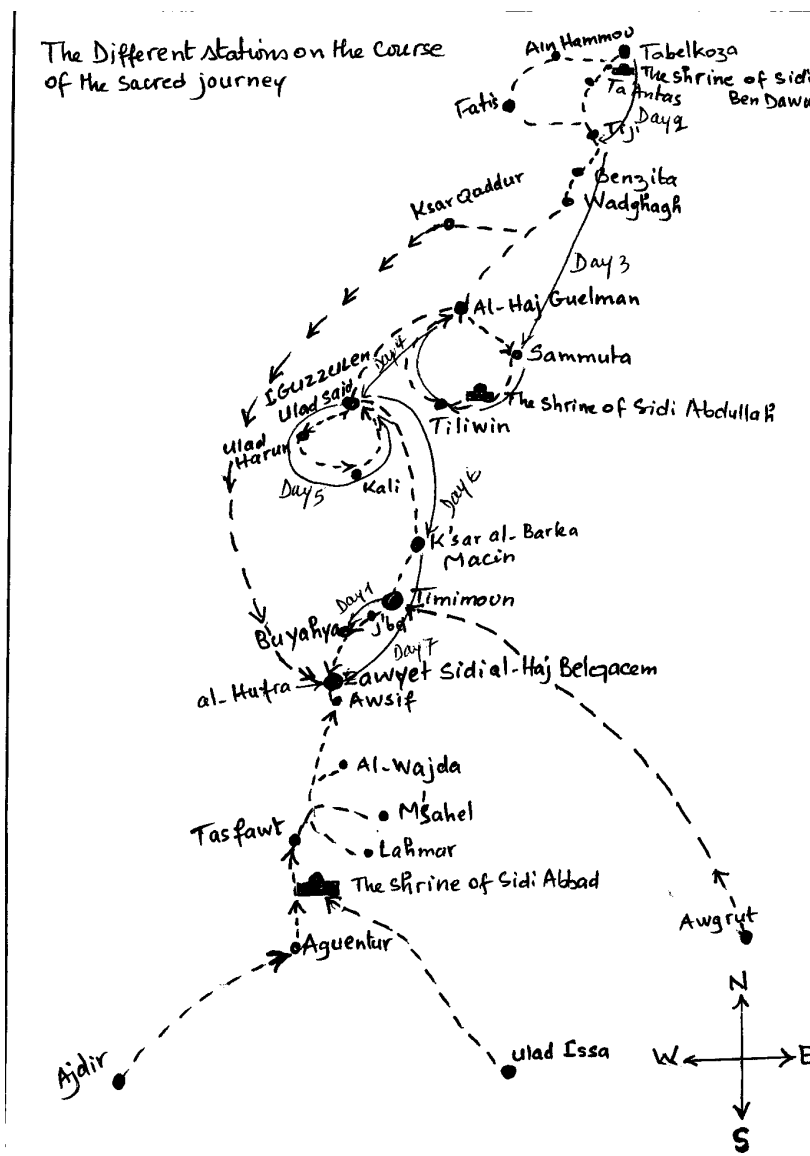


Figure 2. The different stations on the course of the Sacred Journey to Zawyet Sidi al-Haj Belqacem