

Josef Meri - Pilgrimage To The Prophet Ezekiel's Shrine In Iraq: A Symbol Of Muslim-Jewish Relations



*Ezekiel's Tomb,
located in Al Kifl,
Iraq Photo:
en.wikipedia.org*

Prior to the founding of modern nation states and the evolution of nationalist thought among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, pilgrimage to shared shrines was a ubiquitous phenomenon up until the 20th century. However, today one still finds Jews making pilgrimage to shrines of the Talmudic sages and saints (z. addiqim) in Israel, particularly in the Galilee and Beer Sheva, and in Morocco, and Muslims to shrines associated with the prophets, and the Companions and Followers of the Prophet Muhammad as well as other holy persons, particularly in Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

This article will not deal with the theological dimensions of the veneration of holy persons or the arguments for permitting or prohibiting visiting the shrines of holy persons but rather with an aspect of saint veneration which historically attracted mainly Muslims and Jews: the veneration of the Prophet Ezekiel (Arab. H. izqīl, Dhū'l-Kifl) in Iraq.

Pilgrimage to Ezekiel's shrine in Iraq is unique in that some of the most detailed

historical accounts concerning it have been preserved.

The shrine of Ezekiel is found in the village of Kifl which lies 77 miles south of Baghdad in a largely Shi'i region and was one of the most significant places of pilgrimage for Jews and Muslims, especially Shi'is until the first half of the 20th century. As is commonly the case with other prophets and holy persons, multiple shrines were dedicated to Ezekiel. A second shrine existed in Babylonia and a third in Persia. Yet neither was as well documented as the shrine at Kifl, owing to the fact that it was a regional pilgrimage centre attracting Jews and Muslims from as far away as North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, drawn there by the sanctity of the place and its reputation for the fulfilment of supplication and the curing of various illnesses.

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