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## **Consuming the Divine Grace: Circulations and Ritual Reuses of Votive Materiality in Pilgrimage Spaces**

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### **Abstract**

*Purpose* To date, a few studies have examined the use and circulation of votive materiality in religious pilgrimages. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has explored the ritual reuse of votive materiality within pilgrimages. This paper aims to explore the (re)uses and circulations of votive materiality in the ritual process.

*Design/methodology/approach* In the analysis, the authors adopt the cross-views of an anthropologist and a marketing researcher. Votive practices are examined through the anthropologist's past ethnographies. Audio-visual data play a central role in this analysis. Moreover, the authors choose a comparative perspective by focusing on two not famed pilgrimage arenas, each mobilising Muslim pilgrims and food offerings.

*Findings* Revisiting the thoughts of Weber (1978) on the religious field and those of Kotler (2019) on transformational experiences, the authors propose a graphic schematisation to trace the circulations of votive materiality (sugar) involving four interdependent ideal-typical actors: the merchant, the priest, the mystical operator, and the pilgrim-consumer who, in her/his quest for the divine, is the target for the first three. Either pilgrims or mystical operators can ritually reuse votive materiality. However, such reuses are not performed for ecological purposes, but for practical reasons, mainly due to an overabundance of votive materiality.

*Originality* It is often believed that a votive object is only for single use, used only once, for a single request or thanksgiving, by a single person. But we show that once used, certain votive objects –as vehicles for grace– can be reused, revealing an unexpected ritual reuse.

*Keywords* Ethnography; pilgrimage; votive materiality; votive circulations; ritual reuse; food offering; baraka; sellers of change; Islam; Morocco; Turkey

*Paper type* Research paper

“At mid-morning, the path, with its multicoloured, interwoven threads, resembles a cheerful weaver’s loom, but, by the end of the day, the threads seem like a vast spider web.”  
Fliche and Pénicaud (2020, p. 265)



*Plate 1. Votive threads ritual of St. George’s Pilgrimage, Istanbul<sup>1</sup>*

The conversation between the two authors of this paper started when the marketing researcher (Anne-Gaëlle Jolivot) was affected by a photograph (Plate 1) taken by the anthropologist (Manoël Pénicaud) showing the multicoloured threads left by Muslim women while walking and silently formulating their wishes along the pilgrimage path to a Greek-Orthodox monastery near Istanbul. The marketing researcher was surprised to discover that Muslims were performing votive practices in a Christian sanctuary, which seems at first unconventional. She then wondered what happened to this abundant and “sacred” materiality. Were these threads used only once to obtain divine grace and afterwards thrown into the garbage? The anthropologist answered that these threads were indeed ruthlessly collected by the municipal cleaning services at the end of the sacred journey. However, he had already observed reuse of ritual materiality (food offerings) in this pilgrimage, and also in other pilgrimages. We therefore decided to revisit his past ethnographic fieldworks together, focusing on two religious pilgrimages for comparative study. We engaged in a cross-disciplinary conversation to further explore how certain votive materialities (sugar), ritually used, circulate between different actors and are reused. This approach would allow a better understanding of the relationships between the different actors involved in the process of votive rituals, and their roles in helping the pilgrim to increase her/his chances of being granted divine grace.

This research paper is thus positioned within the literature in both marketing and consumer studies on spirituality, particularly on pilgrimages. By exploring the materialisation and the circulation of divine grace through certain objects when pilgrims perform their ritual wishes, and more particularly by examining how votive materiality passes from hand to hand and is sometimes reused, we seek to contribute to the discussion of the (re)use of materiality during sacred journeys. It is often believed that religious offerings are single-use, i.e. used only once, for a single request, by a single person.

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<sup>1</sup> All the photographs are from Manoël Pénicaud.

However, this research demonstrates that there are instances where these materials are reused ritually during the pilgrimage performance. In other words, certain votive objects can be second-handed. However, we will see that these reuses are not performed for ecological purposes, but for practical reasons, mainly due to an overabundance of such votive materiality.

## **Spiritual consumption, votive materialities and circulations in pilgrimages**

### *Religious pilgrimage and spiritual consumption*

In the last few decades, pilgrimage studies have received attention both in anthropology and in marketing. Initiated in religious anthropology at the beginning of the 20th century (Hertz, 1913), then revived in the 1970s (Turner and Turner, 1978), pilgrimage studies have developed with a large volume of work on a very wide range of religious and geographical horizons, comprising comparative approaches and attempts at synthesis (Albera and Eade, 2015, 2017; Coleman, 2022). Eade and Sallnow (1991, p. 15) analysed pilgrimages as “empty vessels” that people fill with the meanings of their choice, and as “arenas” of intertwining and competition between multiple dimensions (religious, social, economic, political). The crossing of religious boundaries has also been questioned through the study of the mixed dimension of certain pilgrimage spaces which, although being affiliated to one religion, are nevertheless attended by worshippers of other faiths (Albera and Couroucli, 2012; Albera, Kuehn and Pénicaud, 2022; Barkan and Barkey, 2014; Bigelow, 2010; Bowman, 2012; Hayden *et al.*, 2016; Zarcone and Hobart, 2017; Albera, Barkey and Pénicaud, 2018). Marketing journals recently welcomed the theme of religious marketing and consumption (Rinallo and Alemany Oliver, 2019), with six journals (including this one) devoting special issues<sup>2</sup>, and an entire journal dedicated to Islamic marketing (*Journal of Islamic Marketing*). In addition to these journals, in 2022, the journal *Religions* published a call for papers for a special issue on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and consumer behaviour. Among the publications on the marketing and consumption of spirituality and religion, a growing number of studies have contributed to the understanding of religious pilgrimages<sup>3</sup> (Cova *et al.*, 2018; Cova and Cova, 2019; Higgins and Hamilton, 2014, 2019, 2020; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019; Moufahim, 2013; Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019; Turley, 2009; Santana and Botelho, 2019; Zaidman and Lowengart, 2001). A specific subfield of research in anthropology also looks at the economic and marketing dimensions of pilgrimages arguing that “the dynamics of the marketplace, with its themes of pilgrimages being promoted, reshaped, invented and exhibited to increase their custom, along with issues of consumerism and the acquisition of material goods and souvenirs, are not antithetical to pilgrimage (or to ‘religion’), but crucial to its successful functioning, development, appeal and nature” (Reader, 2014, pp. 14-15).

The material manifestations and the commercial goods displayed at and around religious pilgrimage sites have been examined both in anthropology and in marketing. These materialities “bring the perceived or believed sacred power of a site within the ambit of ordinary people, and creating avenues through which they can engage with, experience, consume, take home and make familiar that sense of power” (Reader, 2014, p. 168). However, research on material culture and consumption rituals in

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<sup>2</sup> *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 2010, Vol. 15, No. 4; *Journal of Macromarketing*, 2016, Vol. 36, No. 4; *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 2018, Vol. 42, No. 6, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 2019, Vol 35, No. 5-6; *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 2019, Vol 16, No. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pilgrimage studies in marketing can be categorised into one quadrant or another, or at the heart of Rinallo and Alemany Oliver (2019, p. 2) quadripartite classification, whether the key agents investigated are consumers or marketers and whether the main context is sacred or profane. There is also an interest from marketing researchers in the pilgrimage tourism phenomenon, considering “pilgrimage in the context of spiritual rather than religious motivations and actions” or considering “new identities, such as secular pilgrimage, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, church tourism, dark tourism and transformational tourism” (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 146).

religious pilgrimage contexts has been neglected in marketing (Moufahim, 2013; Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019; Santana and Botelho, 2019; Turley, 2009) while Moufahim and Lichrou (2019) highlighted the role of material culture and ritual consumption in achieving the pilgrim's "quest for spiritual authenticity". A pilgrimage is defined by Morinis (1992, p. 4) as "a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal. At its most conventional, the end of the pilgrimage is an actual shrine located at some fixed geographical point. The place has acquired a reputation that draws pilgrims". What draws pilgrims is a kind of believed "spiritual magnetism" endowed by these places (Preston, 1992). It is nowadays well recognized that religious pilgrimages and religious pilgrimage sites are closely embedded in the marketplace (Reader, 2014) and that both sacred (religious) and profane (commercial) elements coexist in these pilgrimages (Cova *et al.*, 2018). The journey of pilgrimage itself creates a temporality characterised by a strong spiritual intensity, which is even more pregnant when performing rituals. Moufahim (2013), in her study of a Muslim pilgrimage in Syria and Iraq, showed that "the consumption of material objects is integral to pilgrimage rituals and transforms the intangible spiritual experience of the [Shia] pilgrims into something 'palpable' (p. 421)". In other words, this consumption can materialise religiosity.

### *Votive materiality, divine grace and sacredness in pilgrimage rituals*

The connection between (immaterial) divine grace and material culture is particularly deep in votive rituals as a wide range of objects, artefacts and organic materials circulate and play a mediating role in the relationship to the divine. These offerings' practices are motivated by the desire to be granted grace at the stage of the request (demand for healing, protection, childbirth, marriage, career, etc.) or to give thanks after the fulfilment of the wish. These votive rituals sometimes require intercessors between the pilgrims and the divine, who pray for the satisfaction of their desires. This relationship involves reciprocity and counter service (e.g. objects given for religious services such as blessings or healings): the circulation of votive objects is thus a matter of transactions with the divine or between different actors involved in the pilgrimage sphere. The consumed objects embody sacred meanings through "contamination", i.e. the transference of sacred qualities from the holy sites and persons to the consumption object (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019, p. 329). The votive rituals can be thus considered as part of the pilgrim-consumer experience of "consuming" the grace that becomes a stake for every pilgrim, as well as for other protagonists involved in the rituals.

All the objects ritually used to make vows or to express gratitude during pilgrimages are votive materiality<sup>4</sup>. Votive materiality encompasses a wide range of objects –perishable or not–, but also substances (e.g. oil, alcohol, water) or food (e.g. sugar, bread, candies, eggs) used during a votive performance, i.e. in relation to a vow (Dittmar *et al.*, 2018). The votive performance occurs whether at the stage of the request (demand for grace) or of the thanksgiving (after the fulfilment). It should be noted that the term "ex voto" refers to both the votive object of the request and the votive object of the thanksgiving, in other words before and after the satisfaction of the votive desire, if any. In concrete terms, an object becomes votive when materialising the pilgrim's wish or prayer. It can take the form of an amulet, an anthropomorphic metal plate, a candle, a piece of cloth tied to a tree<sup>5</sup>, or a food offering. Playing a supposedly active role in addressing the divine, it is given a sacred value. Most of the objects used during votive rituals are either bought near the pilgrimage sites (sold by

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<sup>4</sup> The study of votive materiality is part of Material Studies and Material Turn in anthropology. Since the 2000s, these studies considered material culture as an object of research in itself, whereas this materiality had previously tended to be devalued and discredited in favour of a conception that privileged the abstraction and immateriality of religion (Hazard, 2013; Bräunlein, 2016). Recently, there has thus been an unprecedented acceleration of works focusing on material culture and religious materialities in anthropology (Cohen and Isnart, 2021; Cohen and Mottier, 2016). A significant number of journals have emerged (*MAVCOR Journal*, *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*), and many more publications (Albert *et al.*, 2016; Bigelow, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> At St. George's pilgrimage (Istanbul) in 2022, pilgrims hung health protection masks against Covid-19 from trees, as others do with ribbons or tissues.

merchants), bought in the shrine (sold by religious specialists) or brought by the pilgrims (thus previously bought in the commercial sphere).

The grace refers –according to pilgrims– to a kind of spiritual energy that would emanate from certain sacred places, on certain occasions, or even from certain objects (e.g. relics in Christianity). In Arabic, the term “baraka” means divine grace or blessing (Jamous, 1981), but does not mean “luck” as it is sometimes believed. Supposedly immaterial and invisible, the divine grace would be embodied in certain living beings (persons, animals, vegetation) or in inanimate materiality (objects, substances, places). Votive materiality may serve as a vehicle for grace, but grace could however also circulate without being materialised. It is believed that grace circulates by contact and impregnation. According to Belk *et al.* (1989, pp. 6-7), “objects blessed through sacred ritual are thus said to be contaminated with sacredness” and “places where sacred activities occurred are contaminated with sacredness that the faithful seek to attain through pilgrimages (O’Guinn, 1987; O’Guinn and Belk, 1989; Turner and Turner, 1978)”. The notion of grace thus indirectly refers to two crucial analytical categories, the sacred and the profane, which have been discussed in marketing (Belk *et al.*, 1989) and widely in Religious Studies (Durkheim 1912; Otto, 1923; Caillois, 1939; Eliade, 1961; Smith, 2004). The sacred and the profane are over-determined and schematic categories, which are both opposed and ontologically interdependent. The contact zone between a sacred and a profane space is particularly porous. In other words, sacred and profane are fluid and liquid categories that can change, thanks to a ritual for example. However, these categories can be used to qualify the (sacred) space and the (sacred) value of certain objects when focusing on their circulation.

Both anthropology and marketing studies have investigated how objects acquire “sacredness”, in general, and in religious pilgrimages, in particular. It is well recognized that profane commodities can be “contaminated” with sacred meanings, in other words, consumers sacralize secular objects (Belk *et al.*, 1989). Moreover, Paquier (2019, p. 95) showed a re-sacralization process in identifying in the French monastic context that a “monastic product, originally sacred, is commoditized thus de-sacralized by the [catholic] monks and nuns when entering in the merchant sphere, and is re-sacralized by the purchasers during the purchase moment”. However, the way objects acquire “sacredness” during pilgrimages has received less attention in marketing. Relying on McCracken’s (1986) model of manufacture and movement of meanings in the world of goods, Zaidman and Lowengart (2001) in observing pilgrimages to Jewish saints’ tombs in Israel showed that the sacred meaning attributed to goods is derived from three main cultural categories in the pilgrim’s world of meaning: the belief in the saint (the saints are believed to possess a special spiritual force that permits them to intercede with God), the (sacred) space (the power of the saint resides in a specific place) and the (sacred) time (it is believed that the presence of the saint is more radiant and strongly felt at the anniversary of the saint’s death, i.e. at the moment of the pilgrimage). The movements of pilgrims into, within and away from the sacred site are usually accompanied by various objects, and this circulation of a constellation of material artefacts “is fundamental to pilgrims to relate to the sacred, representing shared meanings in their culture and reflecting their relationships with the site, God and saints” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 534).

Moreover, Santana and Botelho (2019, p. 521), in their study of a Catholic pilgrimage in Brazil, showed that objects are valued in this pilgrimage context throughout three main processes: the power of the sacred site, the rituals, and the movement of objects. Firstly, the sacred site is fundamental to the value of objects in pilgrimages; “pilgrims value objects differently depending on their origin, and objects carried from the sacred site are relatively highly valued in their ability to emit sacred power” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 522). Moreover, “only objects purchased in close proximity to the sacred site are regarded as imbued with the saint’s sacredness” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, pp. 527-528). Zaidman and Lowengart (2001, p. 15) found similar results: for some pilgrims, “the retailers located close to the grave, as well as the goods they sell, are ‘contaminated’ by the sacred power in the area of the grave”. Secondly, objects are more valuable when they are used in rituals, “since they

become protected, sacralised and cherished after being blessed during rituals” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 522). Thirdly, the circulation of objects creates value. “The movement of objects between pilgrims’ home and the sacred site adds value to these objects, as they follow the pilgrims in their experience. Such movement expresses and reinforces pilgrims’ faith and gratitude, and the objects carry perceived healing powers back home. For example, to fulfil promises, pilgrims bring objects from home to deliver to the sacred site and/or take back home objects blessed at the site” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, pp. 521-522).

### *Circulations and reuse of votive materiality*

Few studies have directly or indirectly approached the circulation of powerful objects either within the pilgrimage (Zaidman and Lowengart, 2001; Moufahim, 2013; Perrée, 2018; Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019; Santana and Botelho, 2019), between the pilgrim’s home and the sacred site when going or coming back (Moufahim, 2013; Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019; Santana and Botelho, 2019) or to other places (Perrée, 2018). The circulation of materiality in pilgrimages has generally been considered through two different prisms: the object’s mobility and the actors involved in these circulations.

Firstly, with regard to the prism of the mobility of objects *per se*, several studies have examined the circulation of votive objects and some of these studies identified their reuse. Santana and Botelho (2019, pp. 523-524) discovered that pilgrims wear shrouds for one or two full days during the pilgrimage to give thanks for a blessing, then they take them off and deposit them at a sacred place of the pilgrimage site (e.g. the House of Miracles). Votive objects (e.g. shrouds, *ex votos*) are thus displayed to all passing pilgrims to complete the ritual of thanksgiving and are physical evidence of pilgrims’ blessings (valuing the miracle) or “material proof of a sacred faith that is capable of curing anything” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 532). These objects “enter into a second collective life” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 532). Perrée (2018), an anthropologist, also observed such ornamental “second collective life” of offerings in studying the Catholic pilgrimage of San Juan de los Lagos (Mexico). Moreover, she showed their management and reuses by the clergy to cope with the abundance of *ex votos* in the House of Miracles. Some of the *ex votos* remain in the House, but their display is revisited through a narrative device. The most aesthetic or typical of the local Catholic devotion are exhibited in private and public museums while others are scattered throughout the sanctuary for decorative purposes (ornamental recycling). Perrée (2018, p. 124) also observed that the remaining *ex votos* are reintroduced into the commercial sphere (e.g. bicycles left by pilgrims for thanksgiving rituals, hair that will be then bought by hairdressers). In the latter reuse, the votive object is thus leaving the religious sphere. Moufahim (2013) and Moufahim and Lichrou (2019) observed that blessed objects via rituals were meant to be given as gifts to friends and family members. In that case, the votive object is leaving the pilgrimage sphere. Moufahim (2013, p. 432) also identified an interesting circulation of “supplication gifts” between pilgrims, i.e. pilgrims distributing “to each other various little gifts: a handful of sweets, cakes, dates, bracelets and (small denomination) banknotes. Because of their connection with the saint, those gifts were believed to be high in *barakah*”, and were thus preciously kept for later consumption or as keepsake of their *ziyara* [visit]. The individuals giving the gifts sometimes invite the pilgrim receivers to pray for them”. However, this research did not clearly specify if the “later consumption” and the counter gift (prayer) occur on-site or later.

Secondly, with regard to the prism of the actors involved in the circulation of votive objects, several studies highlighted that objects circulate either between pilgrims and “the divine”, between pilgrims and religious specialists (Zaidman and Lowengart, 2001; Moufahim, 2013; Santana and Botelho, 2019), between pilgrims and merchants (Zaidman and Lowengart, 2001; Moufahim, 2013; Santana and Botelho, 2019; Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019) or between pilgrims (Moufahim, 2013). Before going back home with the purchased object, it must be blessed, either by a priest (Santana and

Botelho, 2019) or by coming into contact with a sacred thing, such as a saint's tomb (Zaidman and Lowengart, 2001; Moufahim, 2013; Santana and Botelho, 2019). Zaidman and Lowengart (2001, p. 15), focusing on objects offered for sale to the pilgrims, found that "an object can be a sacred commodity only if it is sold by certain types of people who are also sacred or nearly so". Three types of sellers, called "retailers" by these authors, were identified: family members of the saint (North African Jews believe that family members can inherit the power of the saint), representatives of religious organisations in charge of the maintenance of the tomb, and ephemeral or permanent merchants. Moufahim (2013) and Moufahim and Lichrou (2019) also observed that pilgrims purchased votive objects in the mausoleum shops or in the local markets. Finally, Moufahim (2013) identified an interesting circulation of "supplication gifts" between pilgrims. This issue of "sharing" is also in line with other works on shrines "shared" by pilgrims of different faiths (Albera and Couroucli, 2012; Albera, Barkey and Pénicaud, 2018; Barkan and Barkey, 2014; Bowman, 2012), where both the place, the materialities and the rituals can be shared in these pilgrimages' arenas.

### *The rituals' protagonists*

Kotler's (2019) and Weber's (1978) works provide powerful insights into the actors involved in the circulation of votive materiality in pilgrimages. From a marketing perspective, Kotler's definition of "the market for transformation" (Kotler, 2019, p. 407) can be adapted to the pilgrimage context. A pilgrim can thus be considered as "a consumer who would like to change [...] a person who sees value in being transformed and who is willing to give something in exchange (money, time, commitment, or devotion)". Moreover, still transposing Kotler's thoughts, a pilgrimage is a "marketspace" where "value" is exchanged between "sellers of change" and "[pilgrim-]consumers" (who search for "experience of change"). The sociology of religion also provides heuristic insights into the actors, especially two of the "retailers" identified by Zaidman and Lowengart (2001) in Jewish pilgrimages. Weber (1978 [1922]) defined three "ideal-types" of "specialists" in the religious field: the "priest", the "magician", and the "prophet". These three actors are often in competition for the conquest of religious authority over the "layman". For Weber, they are in charge –in different ways– of the layman's salvation. The magician (whose power is based on a charismatic authority) is opposed to the priest (who is an official of a "permanent enterprise", for example the Church). The prophet is the bearer of a metaphysical revelation, both the bearer of charisma and the proclaimer of a new doctrine or divine commandment. Transposing Weber's thoughts to the pilgrimage context, the layman of the Weberian model can be considered a "pilgrim-consumer" engaged in an individual quest for a religious and/or mystical experience, in search of the miraculous and divine grace.

Adapting the work of Weber (1978) and Kotler (2019) to religious pilgrimage contexts thus allows to better highlight the main ideal-type actors involved in the circulations of grace from one actor to another through votive objects. The first ideal-type, "*the pilgrim-consumer*" includes all pilgrims who visit the pilgrimage space, either the believers of the religion concerned (or from another faith) or non-believers who have another usage for the site, for example non-believer tourists. The intertwining of tourism and pilgrimage is a reality, and religious tourism has become an industry. However, a tourist is not necessarily an unbeliever who is insensitive to the sacred. Turner and Turner (1978, p. 20) wrote: "A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist". Badone and Roseman (2004) showed that these two categories are much more porous: a tourist can worship with devotion during her/his a priori non-pious visit to a sanctuary, and vice versa a pilgrim can behave in a "tourist" way during his journey. The second ideal-type, "*the priest*" corresponds in every respect to the priest of the Weberian model, as the "legitimate specialist in salvation" and the legitimate holder of religious authority. In a way, he is the representative of the brand of the "Church", in the generic and Weberian sense of the term "Church" as a large enterprise. According to Weber, the Church is responsible for the rational management of salvation and is based on a sacerdotal corps or equivalent. In pilgrimage contexts, "the priest" is responsible for the administration and management of the shrine (e.g. a Catholic priest in Santana and Botelho's (2019) study or representatives of religious organisations in



charge of the maintenance of the tomb in Zaidman and Lowengart's (2001) study). The third ideal-type, "*the mystical operator*" condenses under one term the "magician" (a small independent entrepreneur who responds on an ad hoc basis) and the "prophet" (an independent entrepreneur who claims to legitimately exercise religious power) of the Weberian model<sup>6</sup>. The "mystical operator" is an independent and charismatic entrepreneur, who aspires to the legitimisation of his religious authority, and who is in a competitive relationship with the "priest" (e.g. family members of the saint in Zaidman and Lowengart's (2001) study). Finally, the fourth ideal-type, "*the merchant*"<sup>7</sup>, does not come from the Weberian model, but corresponds to pilgrimage actors involved in business or trade as a primary activity. The merchant is not *a priori* present for religious reasons, but to benefit economically from many potential consumers.

This distinction between the different "sellers of change" involved in the circulation of votive objects also makes it possible to distinguish the type of exchanges they have with the pilgrim-consumer. In addition to the commercial transactions with the sellers when a pilgrim buys the votive materiality, the gift giving is fully at work in the circulation of the votive materiality during votive rituals (either for the request or the thanksgiving). "In the case of a religious gift, a third partner in the gift exchange is introduced [...]. A gift is given by a person to another, but is dedicated to a god" (Moufahim, 2013, p. 424). From a socio-anthropological perspective, the works on ritual exchanges by Malinowski (1922), on the economy of gift by Mauss (1966), and gift giving by Sherry (1983) contribute to grasping the process of exchanges during votive rituals. When studying the gift giving phenomenon, Mauss (1966) clearly demonstrated that a gift is never "for free". The relationship involves a counter gift. A believer (or a pilgrim) who makes a vow always wishes to be granted grace in return (the divine is expected to reciprocate by rewarding the pilgrim). In pilgrimages, the votive circulation is thus a matter of transactions with the divine or between different actors (Weber, 1978). Moreover, the sociology of religion provides additional insights into the relationships between some of the protagonists involved in the circulations. Re-reading the Weberian model, Bourdieu (1971, p. 313) pointed out the "objective relationships of transaction" (ORT) and the "objective relationships of competition" (ORC): "The relationships of transaction which are established on the basis of different interests between specialists and laymen, and the relationships of competition which set the different specialists against each other within the religious field, constitute the principle of the dynamics of the religious field". According to Bourdieu (1971), ORT occurs between specialists (priest, magician and prophet) and the layman when the stake of the relationship is the giving of religious service (cure) in exchange for power or legitimacy. ORC corresponds to the struggle for the monopoly of religious activity between the same specialists. Zaidman and Lowengart (2001) also highlighted the competition between religious specialists when they are all involved in the votive materiality circulation (and its sale).

To date, whilst a few studies have examined the use and circulation of votive materiality in pilgrimages no study has specifically focused on the ritual reuse of votive materiality within pilgrimages. This paper attempts to explore the (re)uses and circulations of votive materiality in complex ritual processes by using the viewpoints of both an anthropologist and a marketing researcher. Inspired in part by the thoughts of Weber, Bourdieu and Kotler, we also highlight the interrelationships between the ideal-typical protagonists who are involved in these ritual circulations and reuses.

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<sup>6</sup> For the sake of convenience, we have grouped the Weberian categories of "magician" and "prophet" under the term "mystical operator", knowing that it would be possible to distinguish between them in pilgrimages where "magicians" and "prophets" are really active (witnesses of apparitions, visionaries, or fortune tellers).

<sup>7</sup> Although the status and term "merchant" has evolved, we use it to retain the historical meaning of the word: a merchant was originally a walker, and anyone involved in business or trade.

## Methodology

When it comes to pilgrimages and trading, one thinks of famous holy places, such as Jerusalem, Mecca, Lourdes or Santiago de Compostela. However, in this paper, we voluntarily focus on less touristic pilgrimages. The Regragas pilgrimage in Morocco and the St. George pilgrimage in Turkey are less known and more peripheral cases, but the commercial dimension is no less structural. In addition, we focus on the extra-ordinary space-time of the rituals, i.e. on the pilgrims' experiences inside the sacred sphere, but not outside. We take into consideration the small ephemeral sellers of votive materiality outside the sanctuary, but we do not deal with aspects such as religious souvenirs or hospitality services, which are part of the "extended" pilgrims' experience. We observe religious visitors as "pilgrim-consumers". Our purpose is to analyse the circulation of votive materiality during their sacred journeys. We focused on the circulation of a food offering (sugar) for comparative purposes. Moreover, we look at that phenomenon in between two temporalities: the request and the return to thank in case of fulfilment.

It is crucial to point out that the ethnographic data were not collected for this paper but were subsequently re-analysed for the purpose of writing this paper through the lens of votive materiality. Indeed, both ethnographies were conducted by Pénicaud during the 2000s and 2010s, adopting the method of participant observation, through the theoretical lens of pilgrimage studies. Ethnographing a pilgrimage (which is a "total social phenomenon" in itself) represents a methodological challenge because most pilgrimages last only one or a few days, which limits direct observation. When it is only one day (as in the case of St. George's pilgrimage), it is necessary to multiply efforts to observe its multiple facets or to wait until the following year to continue the data collection. It is also obviously recommended to continue the fieldwork outside the time of the pilgrimage (notably for deeper observation, comparison before-after, and interviews of pilgrimages' protagonists). But in terms of rituality, it is only in the space-time of the pilgrimage that one can work. This is where a methodology based on visual anthropology allows for efficient data collection in several ways. A video camera has the advantage of recording a large amount of data that the human eye cannot see, for example in a crowd of pilgrims. This makes it a particularly heuristic tool for the study of pilgrimages. Once back at the office, one can spend hours looking at each image very carefully for data analysis. This operation is even doable years after the fieldwork, as is the case for this research paper which is based on past fieldwork. Moreover, still or moving images are not just tools during the fieldwork, they can be considered ethnographic writing in itself (Collier, 1986; Piette, 1992; Pénicaud, 2015a, 2023 forthcoming). Some photographs are presented in this paper.

As a professional visual anthropologist, Pénicaud collected his observations by keeping a diary over the years, taking thousands of photographs, and hundreds of hours of audio and audiovisual recordings. Field data included the collection of material and votive artefacts mobilised by pilgrims and interviews delivering the pragmatic point of view of the different protagonists: pilgrims, public authorities and religious authorities, administrators of these sanctuaries, and ephemeral merchants. Given the immense volume of interviews conducted, they have not been systematically transcribed, nor coded as coding is not often used by anthropologists. In 2022, we therefore re-analysed some of these data (Table 1), focusing on the circulation of a food offering (sugar).

### *Regragas' pilgrimage in Morocco*

Regragas' pilgrimage data come from a long-term ethnography carried out since the 2000s by Pénicaud (2005, 2007, 2015b)<sup>8</sup>. The main difficulty of the participant observation was the context of

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<sup>8</sup> He carried out long-term fieldwork in 2002 (two weeks), 2003 and 2004 (the whole pilgrimage of 40 days), then in 2005, 2007, 2010, 2013 and 2015. In 2004 and 2007, a complementary filming authorization was asked to the Ministry



During their sacred journey, the Regragas are not alone. Along the route, they meet non-Regraga pilgrims (their “followers”) who generally only visit one or a few holy places. The latter come to these places because of the Regragas’ baraka. We will study the ritual interactions between non-Regraga pilgrims and Regragas (at the same time pilgrims and the transmitters of grace). Many objects (sugar loaf, candles, dates, etc.) circulate during the rituals. Most of this votive materiality is bought from ephemeral sellers, attracted by the strong commercial activity, like the itinerant showmen, musicians and beggars. Indeed, each of the forty-four sacred stages gives rise to a local *mawsim* (“annual meeting”), which Reysoo (1991, p. 26) defines as “seasonal festivals, both fairs and pilgrimages to the vicinity of the sanctuary of a holy person”. Locally, the market is called “*sûq al-Baruk*” because it is believed that all products sold in this market are impregnated by the baraka coming from God and the local saint (Plate 2).



*Plate 2. A market of the pilgrimage, below a holy mausoleum*

The pilgrimage attendance is mostly local, and sometimes national and international because many pilgrims originating from this region come back there for the festivities. However, this pilgrimage has not become a tourist attraction at all. Even though the city of Essaouira attracts hundreds of thousands of international visitors every year, the pilgrimage remains off the tourist map. Only a few local guest houses offer day trips for “visiting” a stage of the pilgrimage, but this is still very rare. This pilgrimage is therefore truly part of a local and religious configuration, without the development or interference of touristic practices.

### *St. George’s pilgrimage in Turkey*

The data on the pilgrimage of St George come from a collective fieldwork carried out by several anthropologists, in which Pénicaud participated. Their ethnography has been based on observation (between 2006 and 2014) to grasp the dynamics that run through and modify the ritual choreography of the phenomenon (Fliche and Pénicaud, 2020). As with the Regragas’ case, participant observation was central. But here, the pilgrimage takes place only two days a year, which constrains both observation and data collection. Consequently, Pénicaud carried out this fieldwork with three other

anthropologists, all specialists in pilgrimages<sup>11</sup>. Collective fieldwork, in teams, proved particularly useful in capturing several dimensions and spaces of the pilgrimage (the boats from Istanbul to the island where the pilgrimage centre is located, the main village close to the pilgrimage site, the temporary market located just before the path up to the monastery, the path, the monastery and its surroundings). Furthermore, conducting in-depth interviews in the crowd of pilgrims is not easy, so several interviews were conducted after and before the pilgrimage, for example with the Greek Orthodox monks who are in charge of the holy place and who provided their authorization.

St. George's pilgrimage is a powerful example of "shared" pilgrimage, i.e. attended by pilgrims of different religions (Couroucli, 2012; Diktaş, 2020; Fliche and Pénicaud, 2020). Located on the island of Büyükada off the coast of Istanbul (Turkey), this pilgrimage is initially a Christian one due to the presence of a miraculous and powerful icon of St. George (a major figure in Eastern Christianity) which has been housed in a Greek Orthodox monastery (Plate 3) since at least the Middle Ages.



Plate 3. Line to enter St. George's monastery, Istanbul

Nowadays the monastery is regularly visited by Greek-Orthodox, but also by many tourists because Büyükada, the largest of the Prince Islands, has become a famous tourist destination. However, during the two annual pilgrimages for the feast days of St. George (23<sup>rd</sup> April) and St. Thecla (24<sup>th</sup> September), there is almost no tourist attendance, and the Greek Orthodox pilgrims avoid coming to the holy place. The reason is that, during these two days, tens of thousands of Muslim pilgrims – mostly women– come to visit (*ziyaret* in Turkish) this Christian monastery of St. George (*Aya Yorgi*). Most of them come to perform wishes (*dilek*), inside and outside the monastery, in order to be granted grace (*bereket*). They pray to God/Allah for help, not to Jesus or St. George (Fliche, 2014). However, Muslim pilgrims use many objects (candles, sugar cubes, amulets, stones, twigs, food, fabric threads, drawings, etc.) when performing votive offerings (*lokma*). Most of this votive materiality is directly bought from sellers, at the foot of the monastery path.

The Table 1 lists the data collected by the anthropologist (including votive objects) in each of the two fields in Morocco and Turkey, then used and analysed for this research paper by the two authors:

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<sup>11</sup> Namely Dionigi Albera (CNRS), Benoit Fliche (CNRS) and Aude Aylin de Tapia (former PhD candidate at Boğaziçi University).

<b>Fieldwork</b>	<b>Regragas' pilgrimage (Morocco)</b>	<b>St. George's pilgrimage (Turkey)</b>
Year	2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2015	2014
Votive objects (amulets, written wishes, candles, etc.) collected by the anthropologist	none	48
Photographs collected by the anthropologist	1,130 (film)	840 (digital)
Videos collected by the anthropologist	55 hours (videotapes)	95 files (digital files)
Interviews used in this article	5 interviews	8 interviews
Photographs analysed	90	230
Videos analysed	114 min	28 files (180 min)

*Table 1. Data for the two ethnographies*

## **Findings**

### *Circulation of votive materiality during Regragas' pilgrimage*

The numerous Regragas' followers wait for them along their way or join them at one of the 44 sanctuaries. They ask the Regragas to pray for them in order to receive the baraka in return. Thus, the Regragas are transmitters or intercessors between the believers and the divine, but they are not the holders of the baraka itself. They serve as intermediaries to transmit the prayers to God, which indirectly endows them with a certain symbolic power. The grace/baraka is omnipotent and can respond to most expectations and requests: healing, protection, childbirth, marriage, exorcism, etc. These requests –like in the St. George pilgrimage– can be very pragmatic: success in an exam, professional success, personal enrichment, etc. During a fieldwork in 2007, one of the chiefs of the thirteen Regragas' groups explained: “Baraka belongs to God, we are not its owners, we are only humans and God's servants. If someone is in God's love, God gives him baraka. People come to us and we pray to God. We don't give baraka as something material. Baraka is invisible and it comes from God. Followers visit us, some are sick, others cannot have children. We pray to God for someone who seeks a job, and he finds a job.” In such a rural region (Plate 4), the baraka also has an agricultural function: the harvests will be good thanks to the passage and fertilising prayers of the Regragas.



*Plate 4. White mausoleum (left) on a stage of the pilgrimage*

This system of prayers and intercessions is accompanied by a series of in-kind and/or monetary exchanges. Let us mention the particular case of a chief (one of the thirteen groups) who has the privilege (stipulated by a royal decree) of keeping the money he receives, while the thousands of other Regragas must share the “benefits” following strict rules. During the pilgrimage, the ritual sequences of blessing are continuous and may take place both on the paths and at the shrines. Let us describe one of these ritual sessions. The scene takes place in the outer courtyard of a mausoleum (*kubba*), where a dozen Regragas are sitting on mats (Plate 5).



*Plate 5. Regragas performing ritual blessing for a pilgrim (first rank)*

In the centre, one of the chiefs of the Regragas leads the ceremony. Men or women, the non-Regraga pilgrims pass one by one. A woman (PA) takes off her shoes, approaches this Regragas' chief and expresses her request in a loud voice (a prayer for her sick child). She then hands a small banknote and/or an object (sugar loaf, eggs, candles) to the chief. The latter keeps the banknote but gives the object on to another Regraga while intoning a series of codified formulas, repeated aloud by his fellows, and punctuated by "Amin". PA participates, kneeling, palms open towards the sky, requesting: "A prayer for my late mother, may God rest her soul". Each request is concluded by a formula recited in chorus. PA then runs her hands over her face. Then, she makes other requests, for another relative or a neighbour. In the end, the chief adds: "Don't go so fast! Wait for the baraka [he gives her pieces of sugar] before you leave! Then you won't say that you left empty-handed! The one who arrives thirsty, goes back satisfied." The key point is that he hands PA back a piece of sugar loaf brought by a previous pilgrim. The chief blows on it as if to breathe the baraka into it. Afterwards, PA goes home with the precious piece, which is believed to contain the baraka. She can, for example, use it to drink tea, which signifies incorporating grace. We can thus see how the grace is channelled through a gift (offering) and a counter gift in return. The Regragas are revealed as service providers whose function is to transmit the baraka to their followers.

The sequence becomes more interesting from our perspective, when the next pilgrim (PB) shows up, for example, ten or twenty minutes after PA. The blessing ritual is similar, except that at the end, the Regragas' chief gives her/him all or part of the sugar loaf offered by PA. PB thus goes home, unknowingly, with a piece of the PA's offering. It does not matter to her/him where the sugar loaf comes from, as long as it is impregnated with baraka. The same offering is redistributed to one or more third parties since the same sugar loaf can be divided into pieces. Pilgrims' (A or B) requests are in kind and/or monetised, but the counter gift from the Regragas is always materialised by an object. Moreover, it appears that the value of the sugar changes for the pilgrims –after impregnation in contact with the Regragas– and with each passing of hands. For the Regragas, we see a multiplication of the sugar's initial value, knowing that in the course of this loop, it is converted into money that remunerates them. Figure 2 shows visually the circulation of sugar and its ritual reuse.

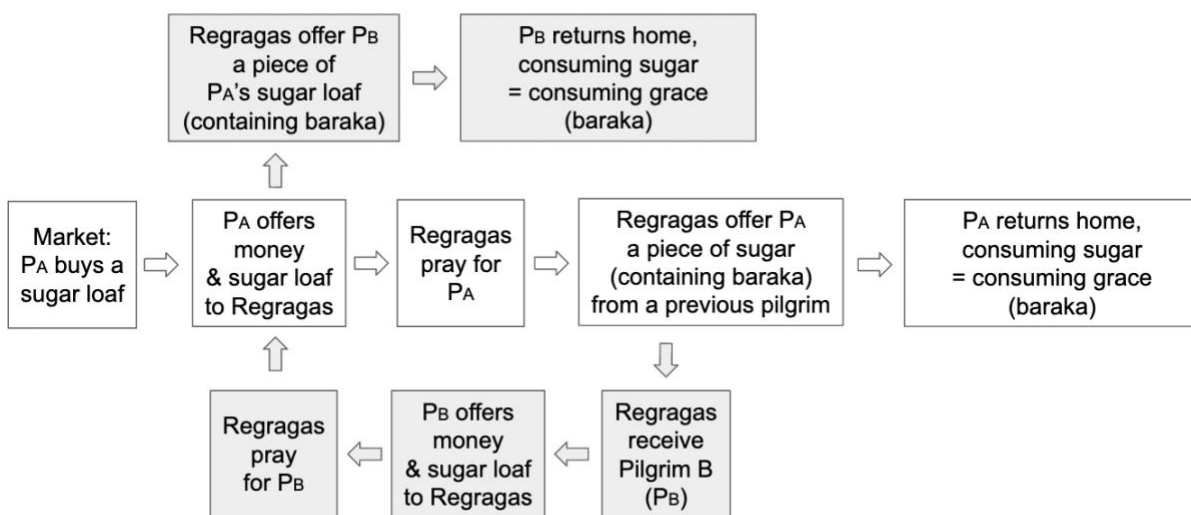


Figure 2. Sugar votive loop at the Regragas' pilgrimage



### *Circulation of votive materiality during St. George's pilgrimage*

For the feasts of St. George and St Thecla, most pilgrims are paradoxically Muslims who temporarily attend this Christian place (Fliche and Pénicaud, 2020) and show astonishing ritual inventiveness, as far as votive performance is concerned. Their lack of knowledge of the rules and customs prescribed by Greek-Orthodox Christianity facilitates and catalyses an abundant votive creativity that invades the interior of the monastery and all its surroundings. The Greek-Orthodox monks are literally overwhelmed by this influx and can only let it happen without trying to contain it. One of them, Ezekiel, interviewed in 2014, explained: “Only the feast of Saint George, we have an average of 70.000 people in one day. That’s a special day, it is beyond imagination! [...] Most of the people that come here are not Christians. They light candles, and when they find themselves inside the monastery, they did not plan to come to pray here but they do kind of prayers or wish something. [...] In the monastery, everything is shared, there is nothing especially for one person. Everything is shared.”

Let us describe the journey of a pilgrim: after taking the boat from Istanbul, she/he walks up to the top of the island, among a crowd of pilgrims. At the end of the road, a temporary market has taken place (Plate 6), where sellers propose many sorts of goods and objects, including votive offerings that will be used soon: candles, amulets, spools of thread, bottles of oil, boxes of sugar, Christian and Muslim rosaries, etc.



*Plate 6. Crowd and ephemeral market*

The market sellers have developed their assortment over the years by proposing candles of different colours, while the monks only sell white ones. Each colour corresponds to a specific request: health, marriage, children, work, exams, peace, money, luck, etc. (Plate 7). Fliche and Pénicaud (2020) observed that between 2006 and 2014, it also occurs with amulets whose number increased from 12 to 27, some specifically relating to military service, exams, disability, sorrow, success, freedom, etc.



*Plate 7. Pilgrim buying blue (for career) and red (for love) votive candles*

Strolling among the stalls, each pilgrim does her/his “votive shopping”, before starting the climb up the path to the monastery. At this stage, many pilgrims –mostly women– make a wish while unwinding their thread spool along the path and silently praying for their wish to come true. Very soon they are entangled in thousands of colourful threads so that each one is in tactile contact with the wishes of other pilgrims (Plate 8). This ritual marks the beginning of the effervescent votive activity that will take place outside and inside the monastery.



*Plate 8. Ritual of votive threads*

At the monastery, these pilgrims write their wishes during the Greek Orthodox mass. The monks will then pray for all the written wishes made in their monastery to be fulfilled. Afterwards, all these wishes are ritually burnt. When a pilgrim (PA) leaves the crowded monastery, in front of the exit

door, another pilgrim (PB) silently but kindly hands her/him a handful of sweets, for example sugar cubes (Plate 9). It is a ritual peculiar to this pilgrimage: pilgrims (PB) who have been fulfilled on the feast of St. George must return in thanksgiving for the feast of St. Thecla, and *vice versa*.



*Plate 9. Ritual distribution of sugar by a granted Muslim*

The ritual consequence of this sugar's circulation is that PA stands with hands full of sugar cubes. After having eaten a few, the sugars are immediately reused in the most heterogeneous votive performances in the monastery courtyard: the pilgrims sculpt or "draw" the object of their wishes (a baby, a house, a car, etc.) from these cubes and materials that are on them (e.g. pieces of clothes, tissues) or around them (e.g. organic materials such as twigs, leaves, stones, pebbles, etc.). Ritual creativity is at its peak (Plate 10).



*Plate 10. Votive sculptures with sugar cubes*

At the end of the day, when the crowd of pilgrims dwindles, the island's municipal services come to collect and throw away tons of votive material accumulated around the monastery. Inside, the monks spend several days throwing everything away. The result is that these wishes, once deposited in the surroundings, quickly become "votive wastes", without the pilgrims being shocked (Plate 11).



Plate 11. Votive wastes at the end of the pilgrimage day

Figure 3 shows visually the circulation of sugar and its ritual reuse.

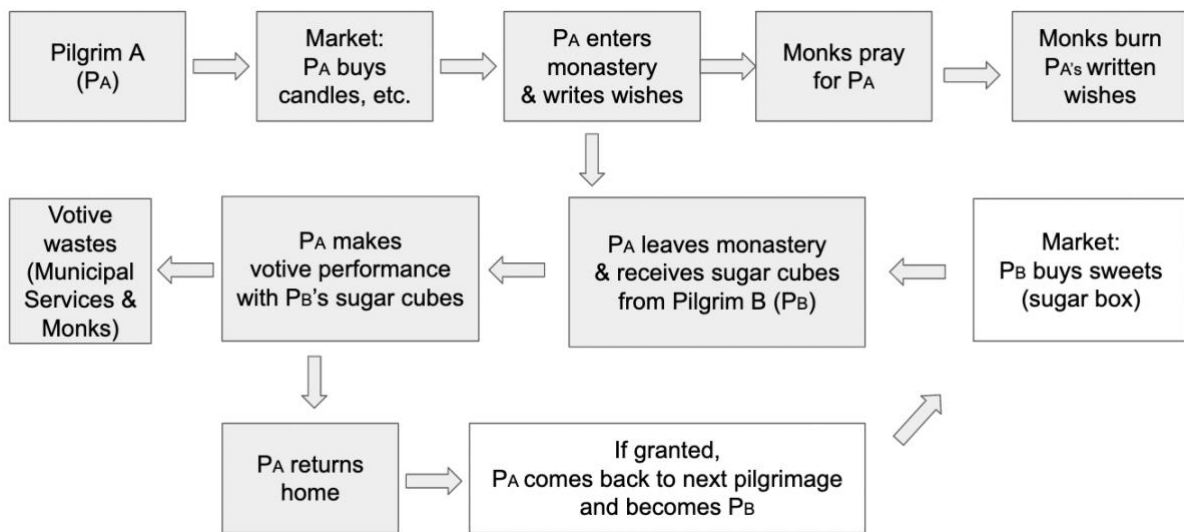


Figure 3. Sugar votive loop at St. George's pilgrimage

### Competing for and sharing the divine grace

Following Weber (1978) and Kotler (2019), we can characterise the main ideal-type actors involved in the circulations of grace through sugar in our two pilgrimages<sup>12</sup>. The monks of St. George correspond to the “priest” in the Weberian model. The Regragas can be considered “mystical operators” as they exercise a charismatic authority over non-Regraga pilgrims. Moreover, they are in search of legitimacy vis-à-vis the State or other religious authorities (since Islamists and fundamentalists condemn their practices as heterodox). In other words, the Regragas share characteristics of both the “magician” and the “prophet” of the Weberian model. Whether in Morocco or Turkey, numerous local merchants set up their ephemeral stalls<sup>13</sup>. Most of them are itinerant and independent merchants from whom the “pilgrim-consumer” buys votive materials (candles, sugars,

<sup>12</sup> To stay as understandable as possible, we present a schematisation of ritual exchanges in the two pilgrimage contexts, but it is obvious that the reality of the marketplace is much more complex.

<sup>13</sup> Upstream of the merchants (professional or not), there are international suppliers who import their products. From a pilgrimage tourism perspective, there are many other commercial actors (tour operators, hotels, etc.). However, these last categories are not considered in our approach.

amulets, etc.). In the two cases, there are no rules or patents to set up a stall; everyone is free to do so.

We further present the relationships between the “pilgrim-consumer” and the three “sellers of change” (Kotler, 2019), exploring, under the prism of the votive materiality’s circulation, what Bourdieu (1971) called the “objective relationships of transaction” (ORT) and the “objective relationships of competition” (ORC). In 1980, the political scientist Mohamed Tozy<sup>14</sup> made a relevant graphic schematisation (not published) of Bourdieu's re-reading of the Weberian model, which highlights the ORT and the ORC between the priest, the magician, the prophet and the layman. Inspired by this diagram, we have designed a new one that models the transactional and competitive relationships between the pilgrim-consumer, the priest, the mystical operator and the merchant (Figure 4). This diagram allows one to see the votive materiality’s circulation, both among the Regragas and the St. George’s pilgrims, in addition to the two loops described above.

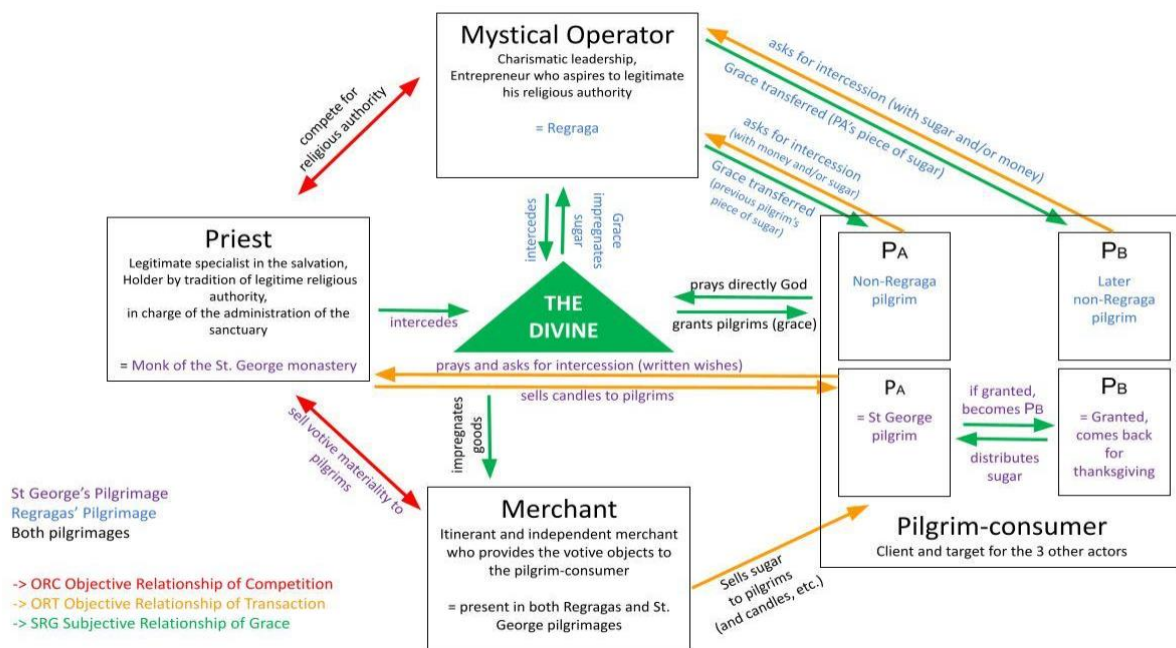


Figure 4. Relationships between protagonists in terms of votive offerings

In our cases, the pilgrim-consumer has an ORT with the priest and with the mystic operator, whom he can pay for their intercessory prayer (in money or in kind). The pilgrim-consumer also has an ORT with the merchant and the priest for the supply of votive objects, since the monks of St George also sell the white candles previously mentioned. The priest is thus potentially in ORC with the merchant. Zaidman and Lowengart (2001) observed that the priest and the mystical operator are both sellers of votive materiality. In our cases, the priest also maintains an ORC with the mystical operator, for the monopoly of religious authority<sup>15</sup>.

The same pilgrim-consumer may have recourse to several types of these competing ideal-type entrepreneurs in her/his subjective quest for divine grace. When she/he feels fulfilled, she/he can only subjectively attribute this result to one or other of these sellers of change. To the “objective relationships of transaction” (ORT) and “objective relationships of competition” (ORC), we add a third type, the “subjective relationships of grace” (SRG) that occurs when an actor believes that she/he

<sup>14</sup> In his PhD in political science, defended in Casablanca in 1980, under the supervision of Pr. Bruno Etienne: “Champ et contre-champ politico-religieux au Maroc: croisement ou hiérarchisation?”.

<sup>15</sup> In this paper, we have not developed this competitive relationship between the mystical operator and the priest, which nevertheless exists in our two cases in accordance with Weber and Bourdieu's model.

can request, transfer or be granted grace. By this, we underline the “intercession” and “transmission” roles of the priest and the mystical operator. We also emphasise the belief of the pilgrim-consumer that she/he has been granted grace through the intermediary of one or other “seller of change”. Finally, we show that grace can also circulate directly or indirectly between pilgrims. This diagram highlights the pilgrim-to-pilgrim relationships (PA-PB). At St. George’s, PB who has received grace will distribute sugar to PA on the next pilgrimage, with which the latter will perform wishes. PA and PB are “directly” related since PB “directly” distributes sugar to PA. In a sense, she/he “indirectly” transmits to PA part of the grace obtained previously. There is thus a SRG between PA and PB. On the other hand, there is no ORT, since PB does not ask PA to pray for her/him in exchange. Though it is not a “supplication gift” as identified by Moufahim (2013), we are here in a configuration of direct “sharing” of votive materiality between PA and PB. In contrast, in the Regragas’ case, PA and PB have not yet been granted grace. Only the Regragas redistribute all or part of PA’s sugar loaf to PB. PA has no ORT with PB. PA’s sugar serves as a vehicle for the grace potentially given to PB. The latter is not aware that her/his blessed sugar comes from PA, but we can see an indirect SRG between them through the mediation of a mystical operator (Regragas). We are here in a configuration of indirect “sharing” of votive materiality between PA and PB.

## Discussion

By focusing on the short-lived votive performances in two pilgrimages, our ethnographic findings significantly contribute to the literature on circulations and reuses of votive materiality. Regarding the reuses, we observe that votive objects may be second-hand in the space-time of the ritual and not single used. Firstly, we identified ritual reuse of votive objects by intercessors between God and pilgrims (e.g. Regragas). Perrée (2018) observed reuses by the clergy. However, in these cases, votive objects were no longer intended to be reused for votive purposes. In the Regragas’ pilgrimage, we found that mystical operators reuse votive materiality that they received from previous pilgrims and redistribute it to other pilgrims. The same offering is used in two distinct functions (gift from pilgrims and counter gift from Regragas for other pilgrims). Secondly, in the St. George’s pilgrimage, we found that Muslim pilgrims reuse votive materiality received from granted pilgrims. Moufahim (2013) already identified pilgrims distributing to each other various little gifts, but she did not observe any ritual reuse of such materiality. In contrast, our findings clearly show a ritual reuse of sugars as they are used by pilgrims receivers to make their intimate vows. However, we must not see this as an ecological type of reuse but as a way of circulating grace between pilgrims, since the pilgrim-receiver materialises his own desires in part by reusing the votive materiality offered by another pilgrim.

Initially, the marketing researcher was shocked and amazed by the abundance of votive materiality. At the end of the St. George’s pilgrimage, the site is saturated by objects (see Plates 1, 8 and 11), which testify to (and make tangible) the spatial density and the intensity of the spiritual consumption. This abundance is crucial to the understanding of the two observed ritual reuses, which are not determined by any political or “ecological” intention (in the Western sense of the term), but precisely by an intention to manage the abundance of votive materialities. On the one hand, the Regragas redistribute the offerings in kind (sugar, eggs, candles, chickens) left by other pilgrims to avoid carrying these objects on their 40-day journey. The reason is therefore primarily pragmatic: the Regragas manage the abundance of votive offerings. On the other hand, Muslim pilgrims at St. George receive so many sugar cubes in their hands that they cannot eat or keep them all, so they reuse them to make their intimate wishes. Once again, they manage the overabundance of votive materialities. Moreover, they perform their wishes with strong ritual creativity, reusing sugar cubes they received and also materials that they own (e.g. pieces of clothes, tissues) or that surround them (e.g. organic materials such as twigs, leaves). It is noteworthy because it means that materials are not necessarily bought in the commercial circuit. From a theoretical point of view, the concept of “bricolage” by Levi-Strauss (1966) is also particularly relevant in that ritual process. Levi-Strauss

distinguished two opposed characters: the “engineer” and the “bricoleur”. When the first conceives and designs the tools he needs to reach his goal, the second does not create any tool but uses the elements (tools and materials) he already has at hand. According to us, St. George’s pilgrims act as “bricoleurs”, they practise the art of “making do” from what is already existing (Certeau, 1984, p. 29). As Belk *et al.* (1989, p. 7) have also noticed, “rituals are often performed without deliberate thought to the rationale that guides them. They are functional through their performance”. In other words, these ritual reuses and bricolages are the direct and pragmatic consequence of the overabundance of votive materiality.

This bricolage process leads us to a deeper discussion of those religious practices that deviate from the ritual and theological normativity prescribed by the religious authorities. The latter have the task of defining orthodoxy (doctrine) and orthopraxis (“right conduct”) in terms of ritual. However, they never manage to fully contain/prevent heteropraxis, i.e. practices considered deviant and heterodox (Fliche and Pénicaud, 2020). This is obvious in the case of pilgrimages: religious authorities (e.g. the Church) are constantly trying to organise, rationalise, frame and manage the practices of pilgrims, which very often overflow, generating all sorts of ritual bricolages. This phenomenon is particularly salient in our two cases which are peripheral pilgrimages. Both are in line with Eade and Sallnow’s (1991) theory, which demonstrates that pilgrimages are “empty vessels” that pilgrims fill with the meanings of their choices. Far from being homogeneous and homogenised sets, they are a multivocal space-time of intertwining and competing dimensions (religious, social, economic, political). The pilgrim phenomenon is marked by heterogeneity. This is fundamental and this is clearly what we have found through these practices of bricolage and ritual reuses. In the St. George’s pilgrimage, the heterogeneous dimension is even stronger because it is a shared pilgrimage, i.e. attended by people of different faiths. As Sunni Muslims attend a Greek-Orthodox monastery, they are even less constrained by the normative prescriptions of the (Christian) religious authority and can give free rein to their ritual creativity, for example by reusing votive materialities. A powerful anthropological interpretation to be further explored is that ritual creativity (especially in the case of shared pilgrimages) is favoured by the specific context of pilgrimage, which is by definition an “extraordinary” space-time separate from the ordinary space-time of daily life, including ordinary religious practices. This is in line with the work of Turner (2017 [1969]) who, in continuing on from Van Gennep’s (2013 [1909]) work, allows us to understand the pilgrimage process as a liminal experience on the margins of society (the structure), which offers an alternative framework (the anti-structure) of action and expression (votive in our case) less controlled by political and religious authorities.

By observing the circulations of votive materiality, we have characterised more precisely the actors involved in this process. By schematising votive materiality in motion, we highlighted the objective relationships of competition and transaction (either strictly commercial or gift giving and counter gift), referring to Bourdieu’s terminology (ORC and ORT). We also showed how grace circulates and is shared (subjective relationships of grace, SRG). However, knowing that grace can be requested without materiality, we can question who then are the main “boosters” of material abundance in rituals. From a marketing point of view, the priest, the mystical operator, and the merchant appear as service or product providers, sometimes in competition. The pilgrim-consumer seems to have recourse to many of them who can help him to increase his chances of being granted grace. But the quest for grace is not always free since the pilgrim must sometimes “buy” his votive objects. It is difficult to estimate if the merchant develops his offer (e.g. coloured candles) to respond to pilgrims’ requests for more targeted or more numerous objects. In the St. George’s pilgrimage, the priest (monk), himself a seller of candles, participates in this abundance. Regragas reuse the pilgrim’s offerings to not carry them. The system of prayers and intercessions of the Regragas’ chief is accompanied by a series of in-kind and/or monetary exchanges, following the well-known logic of gift and counter gift (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1966; Sherry, 1983). However, this should not be seen as any commercial intention from the Regragas’ chief although it is clear that he is personally enriched by this system, as the same offering (sugar loaf) can be divided into pieces and thus

redistributed to one or more pilgrims. The more offerings there are, the more it benefits, in one form or another, all protagonists. This is not conducive to diminishing the abundance of materiality in these two pilgrimages.

## Conclusion

Our research is part of the literature on Pilgrimage Studies in anthropology and in marketing. Initiated from a commentary on a single photograph, this paper contributes to the conversation on material culture and ritual practices, by focusing on the circulation of votive materiality and its reusing, which led us to speak of “ritual reuse”. Indeed, we observed that pilgrim-consumers and religious specialists (mystical operators) could reuse certain votive materialities, particularly food offerings. Moreover, we add to the literature that deals with gift giving and consumption rituals performed by Muslim pilgrims, which has received less attention in marketing (Moufahim, 2013, p. 426). In addition, we explored the singular and little-studied case of Muslim pilgrims performing votive rituals in a Christian shrine (St. George).

Firstly, this paper is the result of the cross-views of an anthropologist and a marketing researcher. Methodologically and reflexively, a balance between a specialist point of view (anthropologist) and a marketer’s distance from the data and the religious sphere, proved challenging and valuable in questioning data and evaluating interpretations. However, it has nourished the results from two different perspectives. In terms of qualitative methodology, let us again emphasise the heuristic value of the audio-visual approach (based on a large corpus of photographs, sound recordings and videos), as it allows us to go back into the field to (re)analyse it in retrospect. The limit is that our different perspectives could also generate divergences that had to be discussed in order to be resolved. Moreover, some unsolved divergences (e.g. an anthropologist has no vocation to formulate social implications) have generated some avenues of research in marketing. In the end, this two-voice approach is beneficial to researchers and proves to be heuristic. This cross-writing experience potentially paves the way for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

Secondly, our study is based on two lesser-known pilgrimage arenas, each mobilising sugar offerings, thus allowing for comparative questioning. However, it should be extended to other cases.

Thirdly, the sacred in general and grace in particular are often perceived as immaterial, intangible, and impalpable. In reality, as we have shown, they are instead materialised in certain objects of (spiritual) consumption. In other words, the immaterial needs the material. Moreover, the boundaries between the sacred and profane spheres are much more porous than one might think, so pilgrimages are always a mix of both. We have thus confirmed that profane and sacred consumption are closely intertwined.

Fourthly, we have observed situations of ritual reuses that we have highlighted through two votive circulation loops. The fact that these reuses concern food offerings is not insignificant: spiritual consumption is then doubled with food consumption, by incorporating it. They literally “consume” (incorporate) divine grace, and we see here an embodiment of the sacred. Finally, these two votive loops could be studied in other pilgrimages, with or without food offerings (e.g. circulations and reuses of clothes or towel offerings in Bulgarian Orthodox Christianity<sup>16</sup>).

Fifthly, we have attempted to schematise votive materiality in motion. By revisiting the works of Weber and Bourdieu, we have insisted on the ORT/ORC and created the SRG category, between four ideal-type actors: the pilgrim-consumer, the mystical operator, the priest, and the merchant. The limitation is that it concerns only two cases. But this graphic representation could nevertheless serve as a basis for reflection for other cases in other contexts and/or in a broader vision of pilgrimage (beyond rituals). Other actors could also be integrated: State or governmental institutions, non-

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<sup>16</sup> Pénicaud already observed similar cases of ritual reuses in Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans.



governmental organisations, international suppliers, producers, “prophets” or “magicians” in Weber's sense, etc.

Our research paper opens new avenues of research, which could not be addressed as our data set did not allow it.

Religious pilgrimages are public events and are managed as such, especially when they are also important tourist destinations. Often only considered as “traditions”, pilgrimages are far from being fixed and are constantly impacted by political, economic, social, environmental, and health dynamics. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all pilgrimages worldwide through coercive restrictions or cancellations (e.g. for our two cases in 2020 and 2021). Public authorities can strongly constrain or transform, including by law, collective events and individual practices. The technological transformation was already underway with the development of online practices (e.g. prayers on WhatsApp during the Regragas’ pilgrimage), which increased during the pandemic. However, our ethnographic data are quite old, which is a limitation to address such issues. Consequently, more research is needed on the relationship between spiritual consumption and online votive practices.

Environmental transformation is also growing and raises the issue of the implementation of practices that would be more responsible in the religious sphere and would limit what we call the “votive wastes”. Even if the “ecological awareness” (in the Western sense) is quite low in our two cases, this consciousness may develop in the future. The greatest pilgrimages are already aware of these issues and are following recommendations for sustainable development (Elgammal and Alhothali, 2021). Further research is needed to explore the views of all stakeholders on the issues of “green votive rituals”, and more generally “green pilgrimage”, in order to consider the feasibility of practices that would limit waste either by reducing consumption, encouraging recyclable materiality, reuse or recycling of (votive) materiality. In St. George, the monastery area and its surroundings are saturated with votive objects that materialise the desires of tens of thousands of pilgrims. At the end of the sacred journey, the municipal services collect the myriad of votive devices, but no one is disturbed by this operation which suddenly turns a wish into votive waste. No one tries to preserve his/her wish intact. It seems that for pilgrims, the intention and the votive performance matter more than the durability of the created material devices. However, further investigation is needed to confront the votive waste recycling with the sacred agency of these objects, in order to determine if they are considered “wastes” or not by pilgrims. According to Santana and Botelho (2019), pilgrims have a “liquid attachment”, i.e. ephemeral and detached, to the objects they use for the purpose of fulfilling a promise and leave in the sacred site, while they develop a “solid” attachment to the objects they take home (e.g. objects they have bought in the sacred site or personal objects they have brought with them, which have been blessed either by a priest or by coming into contact with the tomb). However, they studied the objects left on the site that are used for the thanksgiving, not for the request (demand for grace). Turley (2009, p. 61) in studying the Christian pilgrimage to Saint Brigid’s Holy Well in Ireland found that after the rituals “the good left behind appears to function more as a material metaphor enabling the supplicant to visualise in a concrete manner what they wish the saint to accomplish on their behalf”. However, “pilgrims tend to identify themselves strongly with objects they have made temporary use of”, they are “part of pilgrims’ temporal (fluid) past and future selves” (Santana and Botelho, 2019, p. 533). Turley (2009, p. 61) even noticed that the objects are deliberately bent or broken to underscore the fact that they are no longer intended for use in this world. Our paper has shown the complexity of votive rituals, but we did not explore the stakeholders’ ecological behaviour intention or the pilgrims’ attachment to objects. In some countries, votive wastes ending in the bin are already ecologically recycled like other waste, but never ritually. Who knows if one day the threads of St. George, a vehicle for grace, will not be deliberately recycled into new products (religious or not)? Or if they will be ritually reused for ecological reasons?

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