

TIGRAHIT - TISYAHIT THE HARVEST AND FIRE FESTIVAL IN SIWA

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Siwa is one of the numerous green islands in the immense sand sea of the greatest desert on earth, the Sahara. The oases of the western Egyptian desert have much in common. All of their inhabitants speak the Arabic language as their mother tongue and most of their customs and traditions are similar to those of the people who live at certain points in the Nile valley. And yet every oasis has its own peculiar features with which the course of history has stamped it. But there are manifold differences between Siwa and the other Egyptian oases. Although largely independent and isolated during the middle of the Second Millennium B. C. the oasis inhabitants had come principally and increasingly under the influence of the pharaonic empires. In the Ptolemaic and Roman period the Siwans were completely Egyptianized, had the same beliefs, and used the same burial customs as the people of the Nile valley.¹

But to what race did the Siwans belong? According to Merry who studied many skulls and bones found in the tombs of Siwa, Siwans in Ptolemaic and Roman times were not exactly like the Egyptians but were in many respects closer to the European stock than to the African.² "The physical differences between the Siwans, the Egyptians of the Nile valley, the inhabitants of the other oases and Beduins still exist".³ In fact, the original inhabitants of Siwa belonged to one of the branches of the Berber group from the tribes of Zanatah who mixed with Arab Beduins from different tribes of the West. In the Middle Ages, Siwa was one of the important stations for Caravans and a negro-slave trademarket. Consequently, we find a mixture of negro blood among the inhabitants.⁴ Siwan is one of the dialects of Berber, and although the Siwans speak Arabic well, they speak it as a second language. Up to this day many of the older people, and especially the women, do not understand Arabic at all.⁵

Above all, none of the other oases can boast of such a fascinating history as Siwa, a past that can be traced back into antiquity. Under the name of

Amonium, Siwa enjoyed world – fame as the location of a renowned oracle of the ancients. The oracle of Amun in Siwa was already famous throughout the Mediterranean countries at the beginning of the 26th Dynasty.⁶ In the year 331 B. C. Alexander the Great, came to Siwa after he laid the foundations of Alexandria; in order to consult the oracle Amun. It is not only the most famous visit in Siwa's ancient history but is also the important one which immortalized the name of Siwa for all time.⁷ "Towards the end of the Ptolemaic period, Rome and Roman Culture ruled supreme, and new methods of fortune – telling spread. Thus the oracles in general lost much of their old prestige, and very few people cared to go and consult them. Siwa was no exception."⁸ In the year 160 B. C. Bausanias made the last account concerning Siwa. After that spectacular events were discontinued and Siwa again became engulfed in anonymity. There is not any trustworthy data of Siwa's further destiny in the first millenium. By studying the remains of chapels and sepulchres it can be said that Christianity did reach Siwa.⁹ But we know from the ancient authors that Libyans worshipped Amun as the setting sun, and thus we can say that very probably the worship of Amun continued in Siwa until the introduction of Islam in the 12th century, although it might have existed there side by side with Christianity".¹⁰

It becomes evident from earlier accounts that the inhabitants of the double hill "Siwa" had been split into two frequently warring hostile camps which had separated themselves in settling also. The stronger fraction, the Liffayd, or the "eastern" people, inhabited the eastern hill, while the Tachsib, or "western" people, occupied the remaining, smaller part of the dwelling fortress. General suppositions have been made concerning the origin of this animosity; the reason probably lies in their settling. However, in the event of an attack from outside, the old quarrels were forgotten and both fractions confronted the enemy in unity.¹¹

As early as the 12th century, the Siwans were converted to Islam and in the second half of the 19th century two Islamic sects had appeared in Siwa. "Attai ĩka al-Madaniā", founded in 1825 by Šayḥ Zāfir al-Madani, is followed chiefly by the Eastern Siwans. The second religious brotherhood, "Attai ĩka Aseñüssīya", founded in 1843., is followed by the Western Siwans.

This historic background is important to follow and understand the festival "TIGRHIT–TISYAHIT" which the author watched and recorded during the period 1969–1970, and as far as the author can tell, this is the first

published account of it. However, many questions are still open, and further research is still needed.

The followers of the al-Madania sect hold their ritual feast, called *Tigrhit-tisyahit*, in the first days of October every year, that is, directly before the harvest of dates, olives and citrus fruit. According to their interpretation, the *Tigrhit-tisyahit* means "march to the open." The author does not accept the interpretation of the "muḳaddim" march into the realm of Allah.

It is decided at the beginning of every September which day the ceremony should begin. The agreed term is announced by the Mukaddim, the local *Ṣayḥ* of the Madania sect. The celebration must occur in the first days of October while there is a full moon, that is, always at the middle of the Moslem month. Of course, corrections are sometimes necessary. For the exact execution of the rituals, it is also required that no Friday occur during the feast. The dedication to the full moon is quite understandable, because this way there would be natural illumination over Dakrūr Hill at night. (This also may be survival of moon worship). The evasion of Friday is certainly due to the widespread belief among Moslems that Fridays carry misfortune. According to the Siwans, it is necessary because the Friday prayer may only be held in the city, in the mosque, while the place of the ceremony is Dakrūr Hill.

The Siwan settlement contains smaller units, that is houseblocks and streets. The center of every unit is a mosque or *Zāwiya*. Each mosque has a *wakīl*. Before the ritual the *wakīl* of each mosque prepares a list of the family heads and the members of their families belonging to the mosque or *Zāwiya*. In 1969 the family head had to pay ten Piasters for himself and each of his family members. Every family also has to offer bigger cooking pots, bowls and wooden spoons as well as fuel: palm branches, fire-wood, corn-cobs and buffalo manure. For every head five to seven pieces of bread are required and every household gives a settled quantity of rice and onions. Elders and outstanding personalities contribute with a considerable quantity of food to the material need of the celebration, according to their wealth and social status. The necessities so collected are in the custody of the mosque or of the *Zāwiya* until the beginning of the feast. In the meantime every mosque and every *Zāwiya* organizes work teams for the different needs occurring during the celebrations: cooking, water-carrying, maintenance of order, fuel supply, etc. The most important role among the teams goes to the cooks and their helpers, theirs being the work of taking care of the food for

approximately two and a half to three thousand people through three full days. The cash collected is used for buying a suitable number of camels and sheep. Their number may differ according to the possibilities, however, in 1969 seven camels were bought and this was perhaps motivated by the magic value of the number seven.

On the preliminary day, that is before people go to the hill – and this is the first day of the ritual, – the camels are taken to Dakrūr Hill. Here palm mats are spread on a rocky place and the camels are slaughtered on them. The slaughter is accomplished by cutting the neck of the animal from underneath, while the people shout three times: *Bi-smi llāh, Allāh akbar!* The animal has to be completely bled since Islam forbids the consumption of blood as well as carcasses or pork. Next the cooks begin to prepare the slaughtered animals, starting by cutting the meat into as many pieces as there are participants expected for the rituals. As for the heads and legs of the camels, they are sold on the next day, the first day of the feast in an open auction. The money thus earned is used for the acquisition of other items necessary for the celebration. Here it should be noted that the marrow of the legbones of the camels was used in the lamps of mosques until the beginning of the last century, and the left foreleg was given to the muezzin.

On the first day of the feast the men, boys and girls under ten years of age go up to Dakrūr Hill. For this journey they use *karusa*, the traditional Siwan vehicle, which is a two-wheeled wagon behind a jackass, ornamented with brightly coloured head shawls. The travellers take along their food contribution in the wagons: tea, sugar, cakes, groundnuts, lemons and oranges, muscat melons, watermelons etc. On the top of the hill every group settles at the place set aside for them through many years, and dwell in a plain hut built from mud and palm leaves. The hut of the *Muḥaddim*, the local leader of the Madania sect, is at the highest point in the area. The feast begins with the distribution of the *barakīya*; which happens in this way: after cooking the chopped up camel meat in salted water, the cooks stick the pieces to palm-thorns. This is called "*barakīya*", showing that a piece of meat prepared in this way has special value for fertility, health, etc. This happens directly before noon. Each participant, i. e. each Siwan, adult or child, even women and children who are absent are silently called by name from the list by the notary, and repeated loudly by the head cook. The *barakīya* is accepted by

the head of each family in the name of his wives and children. Those who participate directly in the event consume their cooked meat in situ while the share of the wives and girls over ten is taken home. The *barakīya* of the infants are preserved with salt and fastened to the necks of the infants. (A very similar communal feast takes place in cases of cholera or smallpox epidemics.)

The meat is stuck to palm thorns because it must not be touched by hands. The presentation of "*barakīya*" is followed by good wishes to the receiver: long life, good health until the next meeting in the following year, etc. After finishing the distribution the auction of the heads and legs of the camels begins. The aim of the auction, where the practically valueless pieces are sold at conspicuous prices, is to declare the social prestige of the Šayḥs of the Madaniā sect and that of the heads of families. At the end of the ceremony the time for the noon prayer arrives, and the participants say their prayer, with the exception of the cooks and the very young children not yet used to praying. The cooks in the meantime continue to work preparing lunch. The prayer finished, the participants settle to the ground in circles of nine to twelve, generally according to the teams that came to the hill in one cart. The cooks and their helpers take the food of bread, rice and cooked onions, the *marak*, to the groups in huge wooden bowls. According to the traditions no one may touch or even look at the meal distribution until everybody has his food and the head cook gives the sign to begin eating. The sign is a shout: *Hala 'shabi!*, repeated thrice. After lunch every team goes to their hut and chooses a leader, called *sulṭān*. It will be his task to arrange matters for the group, to maintain order, and to direct tea making, which happens after lunch three times in succession. Tea is served in small cups, beginning with the person sitting to the right of the *sulṭān*. As is customary, the tea is spiced with green mint which has a cooling effect. In the meantime interaction begins among the groups: chatting, delivery of the latest information, mutual visits, etc. After a rest, the ritual washing follows, preliminary to the afternoon prayer. The children help the adults by distributing water. The afternoon prayer finished, the participants return to their lodgings, where they eat cakes and groundnuts from small mats where everybody puts the contribution he brought along. If in the meantime, the group needs

something, the *sultān* denominates the wealthiest member of the group to buy the item in question. They accomplish the prescribed prayer exactly at sunset, then they participate in a common dinner in the same manner as at noon. As for the *ṣayḥs* and the prominent members of the society, lunch and dinner are considerably different. They have a heavily burdened table in the lodgings of the *muḥaddim* where they can eat fried lambs, stuffed turkeys and other delicacies as they wish.

After dinner they perfect the evening prayer and this is followed by the religious *dīkr*. The people form a huge circle and begin to recite the first *Sūra* of the Koran, then they repeat the formula "*Lā ilāh^a illā llāh*" 99 times, the enthusiastic tension growing all the time. Slowly they begin to dance, following the movements of the *ṣayḥ*, who stands at his place moving only his torso in circles while everybody shouts "*Allāh, Allāh*". From time to time the *muḥaddim* or the *ṣayḥ* says "*Madad, madad!*" by which he invokes the help of the supreme being or of Imām Husayn. The movement and the rhythmical shouting lead to a peak of religious extasy, at which they collapse and sit still in extasy for five to ten minutes. Finally, already calmed down, they begin to recite the epitheton ornants of Allāh (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), that is the 99 names of God. At the second name (*al-rahīm*) they rest, repeating "*yā rahīm*". The *muḥaddim* performs the enumeration of the holy names with the help of the Moslem rosary. The chaplet contains 99 beads and is composed of three parts, separated by the sign called *dalīl*. (By the way, a rosary of the best quality is made of santal wood or sea shells, but even pieces made of more common material may be of at least the same value if they are bought in Mekka or at the graves of the saints of Cairo, Alexandria, Benghazi or Tripoli. These latter have the strength of amulets, or are amulets themselves. This kind of amulet is most frequently used to cure children who have difficulties in urinating).

At the end of the *dīkr* gathering circling the *muḥaddim*, the next ceremony begins: the *muḥaddim* and the participants take each other's hands, mutually kissing them, after which the act is repeated with friend and close acquaintances. The *muḥaddim* also gives his blessings to all who come to him. The handkiss and its ritual is a remnant of the ritual with which ancient Libyan tribes consecrated treaties. Herodotus (IV, 300) mentions that among the Libyan tribes, parties to perfect contracts or treaties drank water from each other's hand, or in lack of water, licked sand.

The communal religious singing and dancing have a very strong impact on the brains and psyche of the participants through exhaustion and mass extasy. As a result, the *muḳaddim* and the *šayḥ* of the sect are able to submit the participant to their wishes during the *dīkr*. The believers describe this state as that of a corpse in the hands of a body-washer. Thus it is quite natural that personal differences and problems in the community are settled by the *muḳaddim* in this state, that is, after the religious preparation of the *dīkr*.

Beside the reconciliatory negotiations, jurisdiction also takes place. This is done by a temporary body, raised only for the term of the ceremonies. This court scrutinize the crimes against the rules of the community. It consists of 12 *muḳaddims* who have to reach a unanimous decision and judgement. The punishment is generally no more than that the culprit has to put down his turban, and then has to go to the hut of every group confessing his faults and repentance on his knees. Also he has to pay some money which is used for the further needs of the ceremony. However, these payments are frequently distributed among the *muḳaddims* and *šayḥs* themselves. A "strange" practise also occurs when an ass desecrates the ritual by hee-hawing. Its master is punished by being forced to pay a smaller sum. This is rather profitable for the court, since asses, following their masters during the *dīkr* shouting, bray quite frequently.

The second day of the ceremony is not different from the first, but on the third day, after the afternoon prayer, the *nafha* is collected. The *nafha* is a voluntary present of food from the quantity the participants brought along. In the course of the act an outstanding man of the community together with two negro children (or at least children of negro descent) carry big baskets, going around the huts, collecting from the offerings the suitable items. Then the collection is spread on a huge carpet, and everybody stands around it to take what he wishes. This seems to be a rather original communal event. After consuming the *nafha*, the leading *muḳaddim* announces that the young lads should work gratis the next day at the farmstead of one of the *šayḥs*. With this act the ceremony achieves one of its important purposes in accordance with the interest of the *šayḥs*. After the collection of the *nafha*, the *kaskül* arrives. A *kaskül* is a person disguised in the rags of a Moroccan pilgrim. Generally there are two of them and their aim is to make people laugh! The Siwan also call them *šahḥātīn*, that is, beggars, thus showing the Siwan opinion of Moroccan pilgrims. The *kaskül* walks around to all the huts begging for

food.

After the afternoon prayer, before sunset a procession brings out the ceremonial banner of the Madani sect which is generally kept in the *Zāwiya* of Sīdi Slīman ibn al-^cAmir, the patron of Siwa. The banner has two white inscriptions "lā ilāh illā llāh Muhammad rasūl Allāh" on green background. The banner is stationed before the tent of the *muḳaddim*. After a very short *dīkr* the participants slowly start toward the sacred grave of Sīdi ^cAlī ibn Ḥalīl, some 15 kilometres distant. The *muḳaddim* leads the procession, the banner being carried before him by a boy. According to the Siwan, Sīdi ^cAlī ibn Ḥalīl was one of the companions of the Prophet. By Siwan tradition this saint left his grave to greet with a handtouch Zāfir al-Madani ṣayḥ, the founder of the Madani sect, when he walked about there some 180 years ago. ^cAlī ibn Ḥalīl is also the patron saint of herders. Herders in the desert call ^cAlī ibn Ḥalīl for help when in distress and the saint appears and helps them. According to a belief this saint burns the *ṣayṭāns* who lie in wait for men, and the signs in the sky like a comet are in fact *ṣayṭāns* burned by the saint. Those who are ill or too old and cannot walk so far, remain on the hill and recite the Koran, generally the last *sūras* (100–114).

When the *muḳaddim* returns from the grave, a big *dīkr* begins and lasts until midnight. On the fourth day of the rituals people return from the hill. The procession with the children in the donkey carts starts as early as 7 o'clock in the morning. The procession itself, led by the *muḳaddim* again, consists only of men. The procession was led by the honourable old ^cAlī Yūsuf ṣayḥ as *muḳaddim*. He was followed by the lesser *muḳaddims*, with Miftāh al-Madani ṣayḥ, who was the descendant and political spiritual heir of the founder of the sect, in the middle. They were followed by the leaders of the community and the elders of the families. The procession was supervised by the *ṣāwūṣī*, the officials maintaining order. Everybody wore white garments. The *muḳaddim* recited: "Innani bi-l-ṣawḳ ^calī" and the crowd replied: "Allah, Allah, Allah"

m. Ansikuni min hawāhum

c. Allah, Allah, Allah

m. Wa ṭayyib al-nasī aḥyānī!

c. Allah, Allah, Allah

*m. Kam ^candi lahum min huḳuḳⁱⁿ
wa-^cuhudⁱⁿ la tudanⁱⁿ*

c. Allah, Allah, Allah

m. Awda^cuhā wa-aḳkamuhā

The text of Sufi inspiration expresses the desire to unite with God:

”How I desire
Allah, Allah, Allah
Allow me to smell the incense of the
saints, the good smell revived me,
Allah, Allah, Allah
How much I owe them, and how many wonderful
promise,
Allah, Allah, Allah
(Promises) they took from me . . . ”

It is clear on first sight that the procession follows an ancient tradition, and this notion is strengthened by the organized, faultless execution of mass singing, even though the procession gradually grows as new participants join at the skirts.

In the meantime women burn incense behind the windows and blow the smoke towards the street while making a sharp sound accompanied by the rapid movement of their tongues. Viewing this ceremonial procession one cannot escape the thought that it is hardly different from what an Amon procession in Siwah could be, with the Amon priest carrying the symbols of God and with the accompanying maidens in white garments.

The procession reached Sīdi Sīlman’s, the patron of Siwa, *Zāwiya* after about one and a half hours. At the grave the procession dissolved and made a huge circle. The banner was erected in the middle and the *dīkr* began, led by ^ʿAlī Yūsuf *ṣayḥ*. Half an hour later after the *dīkr*, the procession recommenced with considerably fewer participants, more or less only the outstanding men, leaving Siwa for the *Zāwiya* of Sīdi Miftāh. This was the final act of the ceremony: Sīdi Miftāh stopped at the gate of the *Zāwiya*, with ^ʿAlī Yūsuf *muḥaddim* and other *muḥaddims* by his side. Water was brought to *ṣayḥ* Miftāh in a metal cup and he recited over it the first *sūra* of the Koran, then murmured unintelligibly and spat into the cup several times. Next ^ʿAlī Yūsuf *ṣayḥ* took the cup and sprinkled the participants with the contents. (Spitting as a magical act was used by several saints and rulers, with the aim of curing cf. Mk 7:33, 8:22; Jn 9:6; cf. also the description by Suetonius of Ceasar Vespasianus who returned the gift of sight to a man in this way, cf. also the usage of spitting against snake poison among the Libyan tribes). Finally *ṣayḥ* Miftāh, ^ʿAlī Yūsuf and the other *muḥaddims* bade farewell to the rest of the participants by the ritual of the

hand touch and hand-kiss, and by this act the ceremonies were concluded.

The Moslem religious cover of the ceremony must not mislead us. This is basically a pagan harvest ritual. Under an overwhelming Islam influence the Siwan people, willingly or involuntarily, had to modify their rituals in order to adopt the wishes and possibilities rendered by the stronger, conquering cultural influence. According to a Siwan manuscript the ceremony proceeded as follows: "It is a custom of the Siwan that every year they assemble at a place called ^CAdah where men dance with men and women with women." (The partition of the sexes by the anonymous author was probably due to the fact that he studied at the Azhar, and thus tried to veil the licentious character of the ceremony.) The manuscript continues: 'Everybody brought his own food, which contained bread stuffed with knotweed and some kind of beans. Knotweed is sometimes cooked with lentil, and this is called *igayrin* in Siwa .. This meal is kept in the custody of trusted men until the celebration begins." One finds the same phenomenon occurring during the preparations for the *tisyahit*, and the *naf ha*. They are manifestations of the collective character of the ritual ("The women eat together with the women, and the men with the men"). This continues through the whole day and even at night; they eat, dance and then return home.¹²

The main event of the ceremony consisted of extinguishing all lights and was followed by promiscuous intercourse. According to Bates,¹³ in spite of its barbaric nature this event had the religious aim of ensuring fertility. Comparing these rituals one may be convinced that they are basically harvest ceremonies. In spite of its brevity and biased character, the interesting text of the manuscript is important for the understanding of the Siwan ethno-psychological and behavioral patterns. By studying historical reports which mention similar phenomena and the Siwan manuscript it becomes clear that this feast is an original pagan ritual which has never disappeared from the life of the Siwan people, it has appeared again and again with different names. We may also trace it in the details of the ^C*āsūrā* ceremony.

The ^CĀsūrā

According to the Siwan manuscript, the ^C*āsūrā* ceremony was initiated by men working at oil presses. The ceremony went this way: An old rag was submerged in olive oil. When saturated, it was wrapped around an olive stick three yards long and lighted when night fall. The people carried this torch around the village the entire night while they drummed and played flutes. This continued through seven days.¹⁴

The participants spend much money for sheep and fermented palm sap, and many give away all the money saved during the previous year. At the end of the seventh day each person sticks his torch into the ground, and sings and dances around it. Today the Siwan women still know and sing a song belonging to this event.

ᶜIdi, ᶜidi, yā ᶜammūdi!

"Come back, come back, day of the feast!"

It is hardly plausible that the Siwan women, now closed in their houses, not allowed to mix with foreign men in any way, and completely veiled outdoors, did not participate in such a celebration or at least that their grandmothers did not.

Though the ᶜāšūrā' appears today as an event of Islamic origin, it has its roots in Jewish antecedents. The Moslem year begins on the 10th day of the month Muḥarram. This date coincides – by chance – with the martyrdom of the Imām Ḥusayn, son of ᶜAlī, grandson of Muḥammad, who died on this day on the field of Karbalā' on October 10, 680. A. D. This memorial ceremony gained importance in North-Africa under the Fātimid Empire. With the collapse of the Fātimides the importance of the ᶜāšūrā' lessened but it still maintained an outstanding role among ṣīᶜits. The ᶜāšūrā' was originally introduced by the prophet Muḥammad, hoping that Jews would incline to his doctrines, since the ᶜāšūrā' was the ritual of the Tent, the 10th day of the month Tišrīn in the Jewish calendar.¹⁵ In addition, this day, the 10th of Muḥarram, is exceptionally sacred in the Moslem belief because this was the day on which Adam and Eve first met after their expulsion from Paradise. On this day Arabs of ḡāhiliyya, the age before Muḥammad, fasted under Jewish influence.¹⁶

It is a widespread belief among Egyptians that the first ten days of Muḥarram are especially sacred, and any religious Moslem fasts these days. On the 10th day they cook wheat previously soaked for two days. The husked, cooked wheat is mixed with milk and sugar, and is a very much preferred meal. According to some traditions this was the day when Muḥammad showed special attention to his family, so in the Islam world men try to copy him on this day.¹⁷

Fertility ceremony behind the ᶜāšūrā'

Some days before the ᶜāšūrā', children ornament the roofs of the houses with palm leaves. They fasten a rag saturated with olive oil to every palm branch. On the vigil of the ᶜāšūrā' the rags are lighted, so the whole village

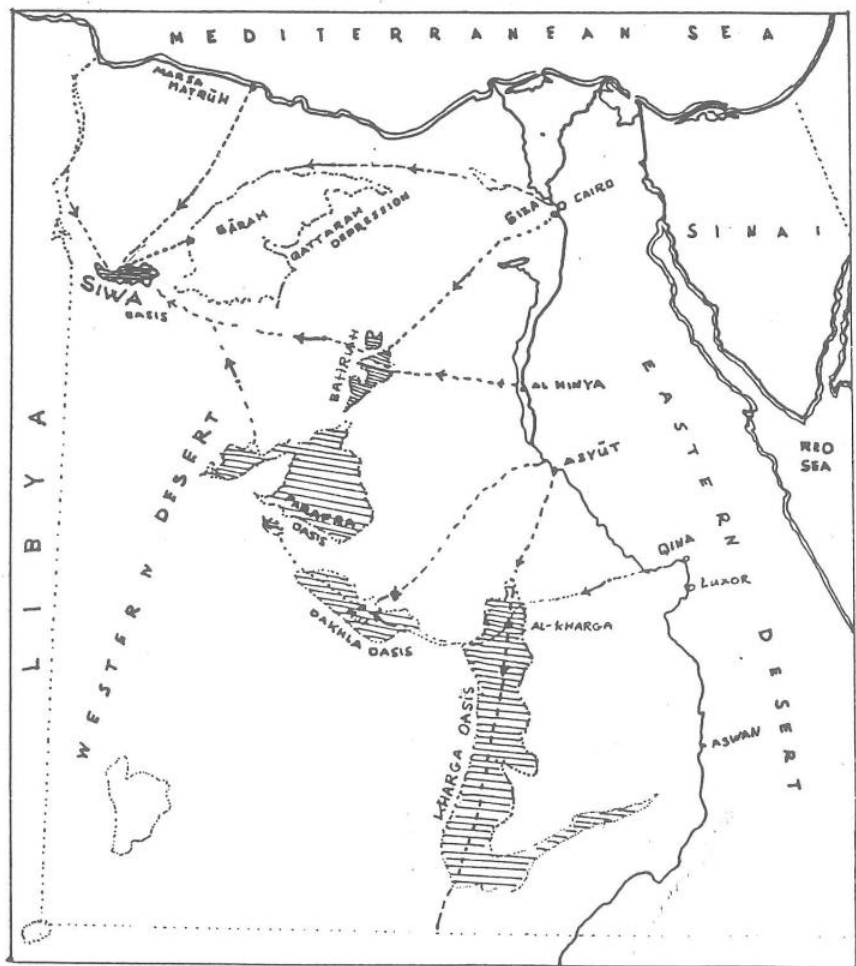
is brilliantly illuminated. Then, on the morning of the ceremony, children come out of the houses with palm branches in hand which are ornamented with the fruits of the season (citrus, pomegranate, dates etc.) and they gayly exchange the fruits (cf. the nature of the ritual, connected with harvest, and the manifestations of communality.) The importance of fire and smoke needs further investigations.

NOTES

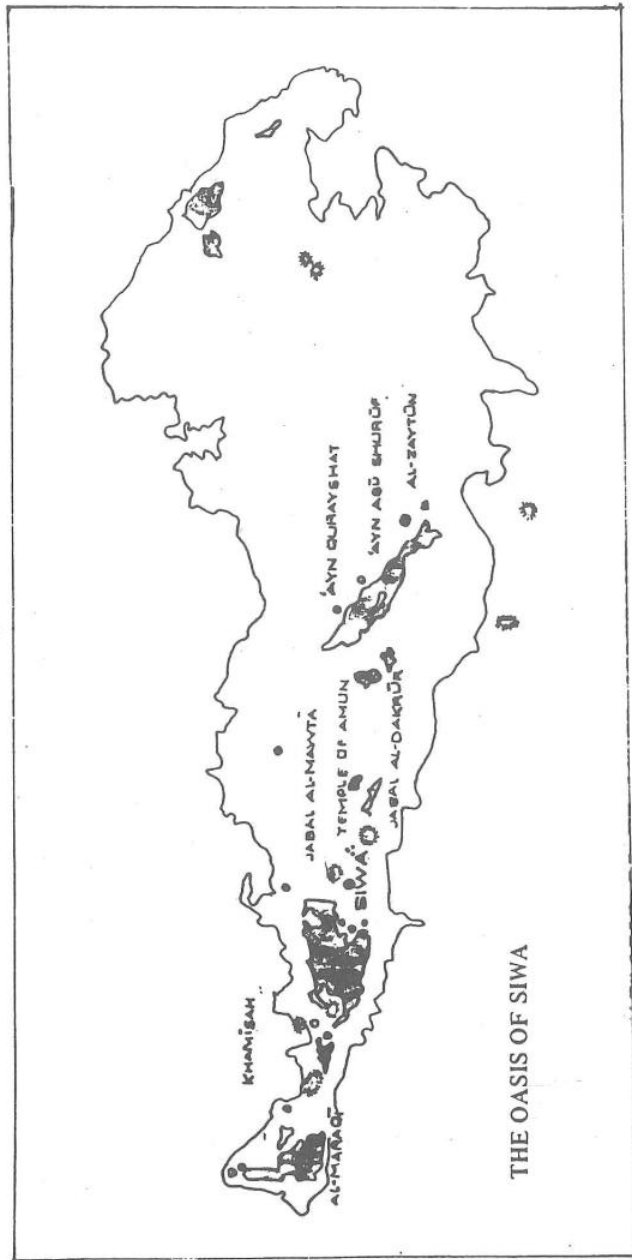
1. For references on Siwa see:

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2. See: Douglas, E.; Merry
3. Fakhry, pp. 13–174, 1973.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.; Sik Endre: *The History of Black Africa*. vol. I. p. 112 (map) Budapest, 1970.
5. Fakhry, 1973, p. 35.
6. Fakhry, 1944 p. 25. 1973. p. 77, Stein, p. 9.
7. For full details see: Steindorff, 1904; Uhlich, W., 1928, 1930; Stein pp. 9–10.

8. Stein. pp. 10–11. Fakhry, 1973. p. 89.
9. Laoust; *Encyclopadia of Islam*¹, IV. p. 485; Fakhry, 1973, p. 90.
10. Fakhry, 1973, p. 94; Stein, p. 10
11. Fakhry, 1973, pp. 28–29, 95–100; Stein, p. 16.
12. Murray, 1945, p. 82. Cf. Nicolaus Damascenus fragm. 135, F. H. G.
13. Bates, 1914, p. 178.
14. Cf. J. G. Frazer: *The Golden Bough*, London, 1978. Fire -purification pp. 260–261, Fire-festivals p. 798.
15. Brockelmann, C.: *History of the Islamic Peoples*, London, 1980, p. 22.
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17. *Ibid.*, p. 424.



1. The geographic situation of Siwa and the most important desert routes leading to it.



2. The Siwan depression and its settlements



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al-sahhatin