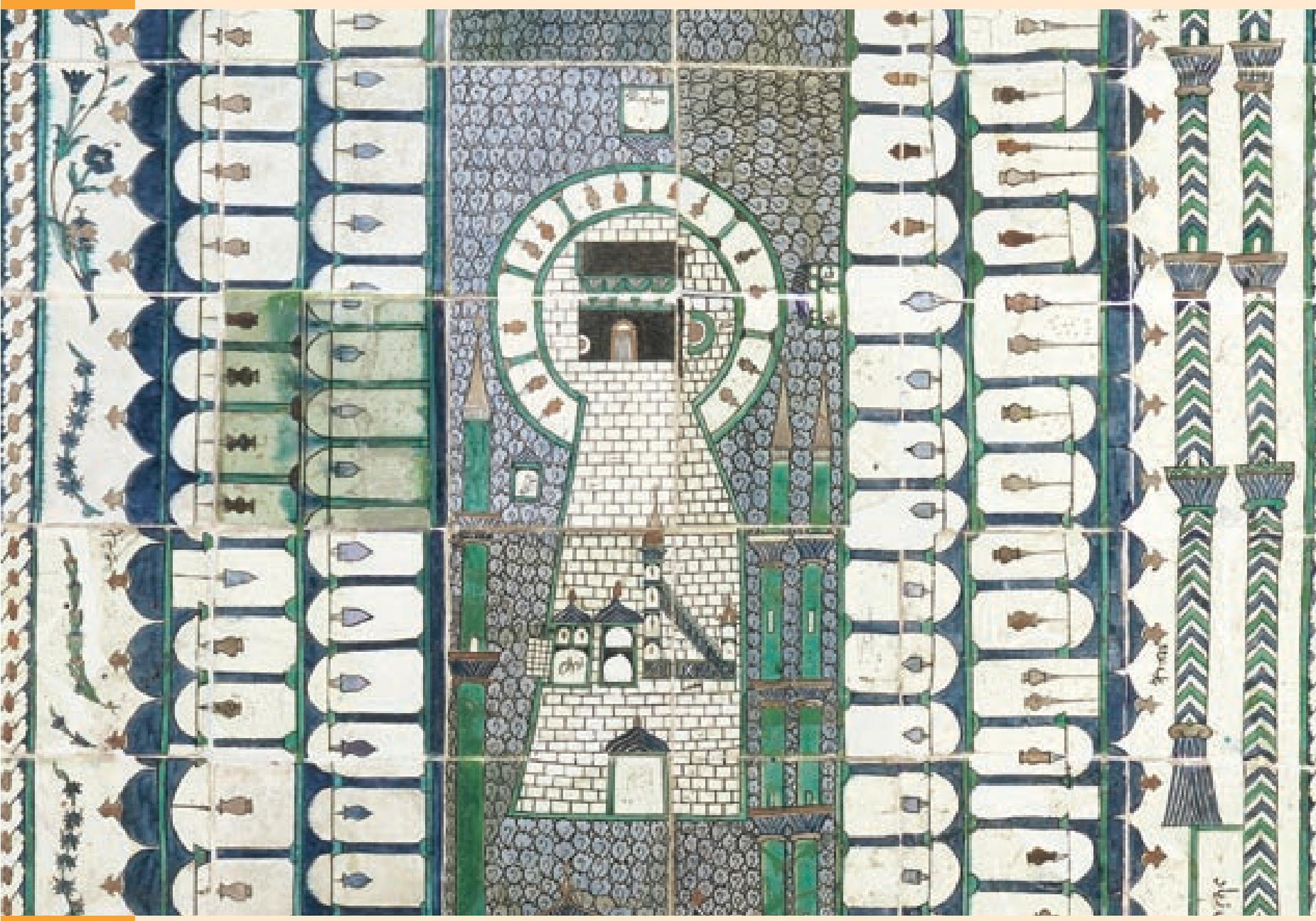


# The *Hajj*: Pilgrimage in Islam

Nazmi Al-Jubeh



**Ceramic tile panel (detail)**  
Depicting the *Ka'ba* in Mecca.

*Ottoman*, AH 1087/AD 1676  
Museum of Islamic Art  
Cairo, Egypt

## The *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) in Islam

The *hajj* or pilgrimage is one of the five fundamental duties or 'pillars' of Islam and one of the shortest paths to God.

It is not known entirely when the *hajj* to Mecca began, but its origins certainly go back to a time well before the advent of Islam and thus date to what the Muslims call the period of ignorance or *Jahiliyya*.

Mecca, one of the few small towns of the Hijaz before Islam, claimed its centrality by controlling the main trade routes that connected the different markets of Africa, India, the Middle East and the Western Mediterranean. Merchants from Mecca travelled in two main caravans; the first took place in the summer towards the north, the second in the winter to the south. In turn, merchants from all over the Arab peninsula and beyond converged on Mecca, particularly in the annual pilgrimage season when homage was paid to an array of local idols housed in the *Ka'ba*.

The *Ka'ba*, according to Muslim belief, had originally been built by Allah's prophet Abraham upon the same site that Adam had once built the 'first house' used for the worship of Allah. Abraham had exiled his wife Hagar and her son Ismail (Ishmael) to the 'valley where nothing grows' in Mecca. Hagar ran between al-Safaa and al-Marwah looking for water for her son.

### Key for the *Ka'ba*

Mamluk, AH 765/AD 1363  
Museum of Islamic Art  
Cairo, Egypt



### Topographical view of Mecca

Used by pilgrims for orientation  
during the *hajj*.

Ottoman, AH early 12th/AD early 18th century  
Uppsala University Library  
Uppsala, Sweden





**Qibla directional plate**

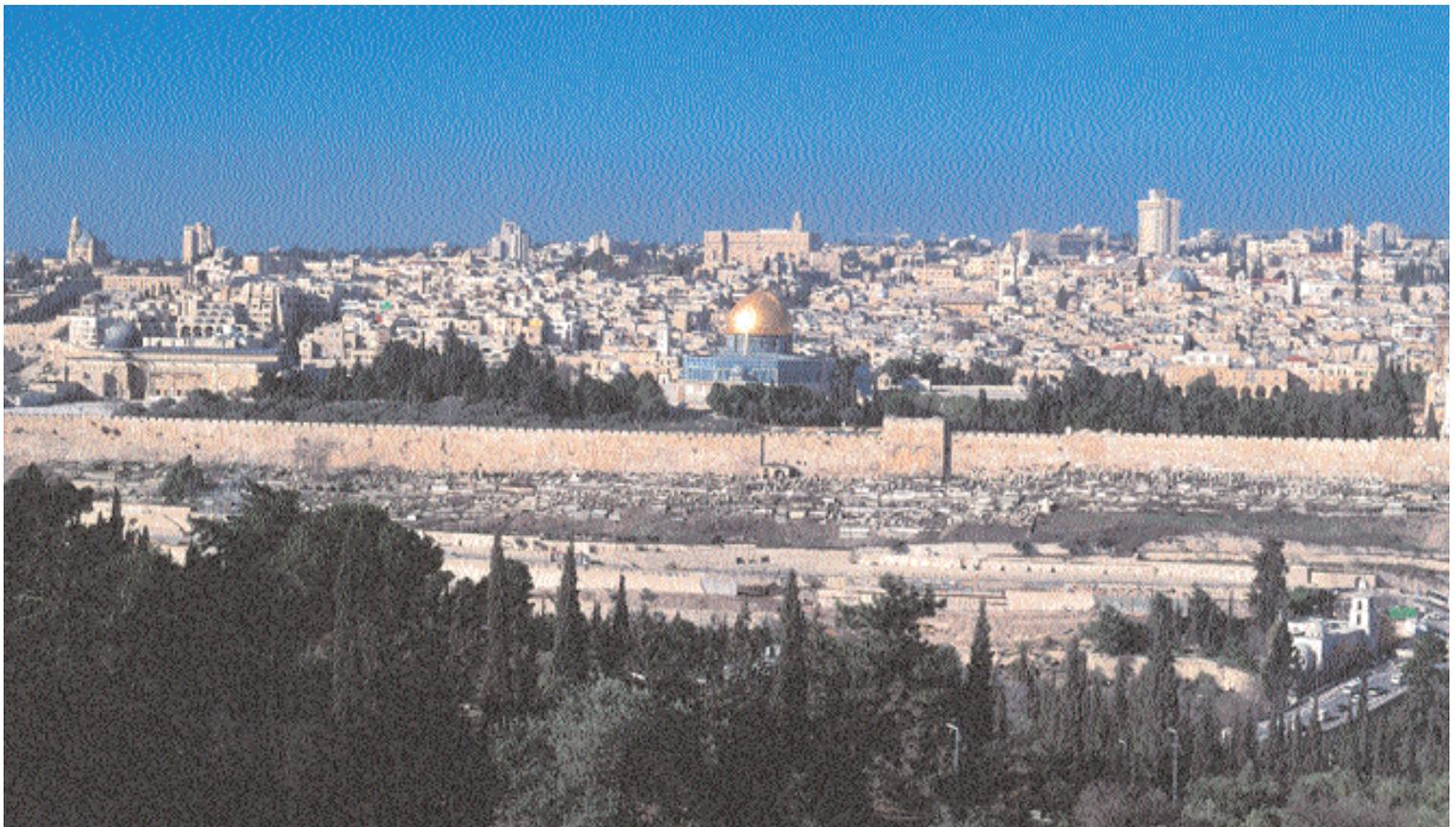
Used to pinpoint the direction of the Ka'ba.

*Ottoman, AH 918–26/AD 1512–20*  
National Museum  
Damascus, Syria

**The Haram al-Sharif**

The 'Noble Sanctuary', where the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque are located. It was blessed by God in the Holy Qur'an and was made the first *qibla* for Muslims.

*Building began in AH 15/AD 637 and continued until AH 1336/AD 1917.*  
Jerusalem



**Pilgrim flask**

Mamluk, AH 742–6/AD 1341–5  
National Museum  
Damascus, Syria



Suddenly, the holy water of Zamzam came gushing forth between the feet of her baby boy. As thanksgiving to God, Abraham built the *Ka'ba*, dedicated it to Him and offered sacrifices in it. God then commanded him to walk around the *Ka'ba* seven times to pay homage and worship.

By the *Jahiliyya* period the *Ka'ba* had long become a focus of idol worship. At that time the shrine and much of Mecca's trading activity was controlled by the powerful tribe of Quraysh.

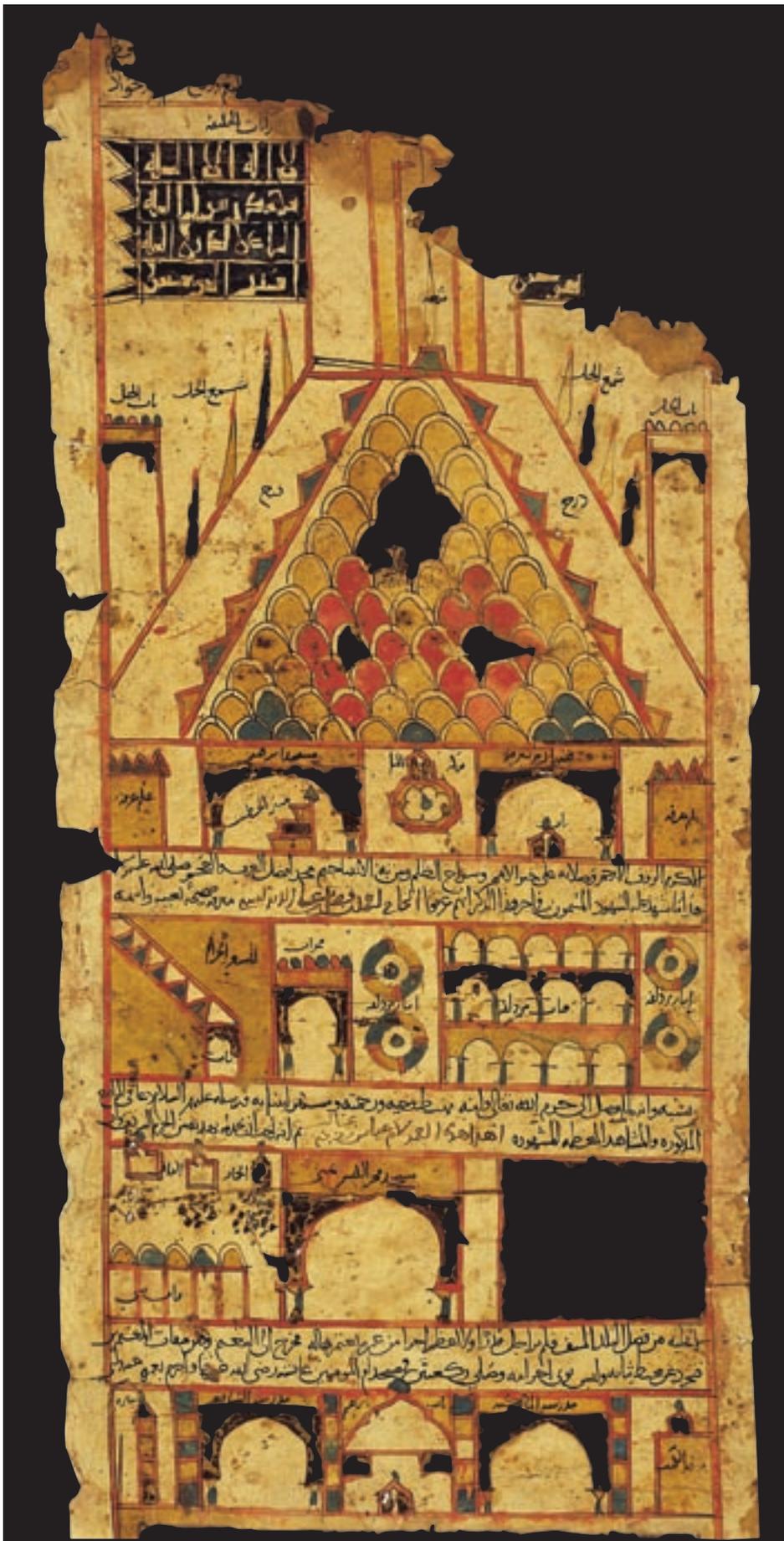
It was into an impoverished branch of this tribe that Muhammad, the prophet of Islam was born in AD 570. He, too, grew up a merchant but soon grew weary of the material greed and polytheistic excesses of his contemporaries. According to Islamic tradition Muhammad was chosen by Allah as the last messenger of the true faith and he set about bringing His will to the people and teaching them to live according to His laws. The annual pilgrimage was one of the traditional customs that were now transformed according to the will of Allah.

Indeed, Islam and the directives within the Holy Qur'an as revealed to the Prophet transformed the *hajj* into a duty incumbent upon every Muslim once in a lifetime if physically and financially able. Mecca and its *Ka'ba* shed their pagan significance and became the global focus for a growing Muslim community in two important respects. Firstly, Allah instructed the Prophet to have all Muslims pray towards Mecca and the *Ka'ba* after having originally directed their prayer towards Jerusalem. Secondly, Mecca and the *Ka'ba* became the centre for the Muslim *hajj*, undertaken once a year in the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah.



**Piece of the *kiswa* (cover) of the *Ka'ba***  
Renewed every year before the *hajj*  
season.

Ottoman, AH 13th/AD 19th century  
Islamic Museum and Al-Aqsa Library  
Jerusalem



**Pilgrimage proxy scroll**

People who sent a proxy on their own behalf received a certificate like this one to prove that all the requirements of the pilgrimage had been fulfilled.

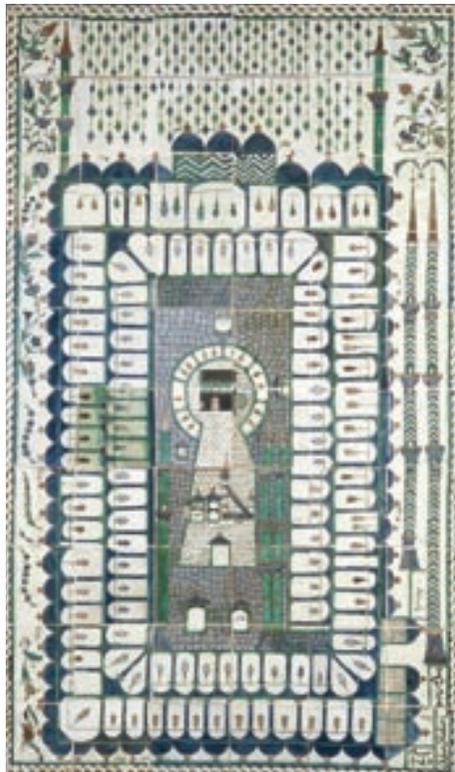
Ayyubid, AH 602/AD 1206  
 Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts  
 Istanbul, Turkey



**Milestone**

Erected to indicate the distance between two stations along a pilgrimage or trade route.

Umayyad, AH 66–86/AD 685–705  
 Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts  
 Istanbul, Turkey



Ceramic tile panel

Ottoman, AH 1087/AD 1676  
Museum of Islamic Art  
Cairo, Egypt

In terms of ritual, the Prophet adopted many pre-Islamic customs associated with the performance of the pilgrimage, but He abandoned the practice of naked circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*. Instead he now ordered that pilgrims wear light, white clothing. An unsewn white garment (known as an *ihram*) is worn by all male pilgrims, who commence the pilgrimage rituals by calling on God to accept their repentance, and supplicate him: 'Here I am at Your service O Allah, I am present, there is no partner with You.'

A complex set of rituals is associated with the *hajj* which culminates in a stay on Mount Arafat (*Waquf*) and is concluded with an offering of sacrifice to God Almighty. This marks the beginning of *'Eid al-Adha* (The Feast of Sacrifice), the most important of Islamic festivals. As an extension to the *hajj* duties, Muslim pilgrims also visit the grave of the Prophet, his mosque at Medina and other shrines and sites, the most important of which is the Holy City of Jerusalem.

In recent decades the *'Umra*, an undertaking of the *hajj* rituals possible at any point during the year, has gained importance in Muslim practice due to the fact that the *hajj* season can no longer accommodate the enormous numbers of Muslims who want to take part. In modern times the Saudi government has restricted the numbers of pilgrims that are allowed to undertake the *hajj* during Dhu al-Hijjah every year and, thus, the *'Umra* remains an alternative for those who aspire to visit Mecca.

In their care of the Holy Cities and commitment to organising the Islamic pilgrimage, the Saudi Government continues a time-honoured tradition according to which Muslim rulers prided themselves not only in their ability to facilitate the annual rituals in Mecca itself, but also to organise the journey of Muslim pilgrims from the far-flung regions of the Muslim world. Of course, the provision of these services was not just a political and administrative duty but was also a source of political legitimacy and – most importantly – a request for recompense and blessings from Allah. Special interconnecting roads for *hajj* caravans (*darb al-hajj*) were built from all parts of the Muslim world and were equipped by the authorities with all the necessary facilities needed for the pilgrims' comfort. A sophisticated system of inns and resting places lined the route to cater for the ever-increasing caravans that included not only pilgrims but also merchants, support personnel and – if caliphs or sultans were present – an extensive official entourage, military units and musicians.

#### Terms relating to the Hajj

**Hajj:** The fifth pillar of Islam. It is the duty of every Muslim to fulfil *hajj* at least once in a lifetime providing he or she is able to do so in terms of health and resources.

***Ka'ba* of Mecca or *Ka'ba* of Quraysh:** There were many Arab tribes before Islam who had *Ka'bas*. With the advent of Islam, these became nullified and the singularity of the *Ka'ba* was emphasised with the one *Ka'ba* at Mecca. *Ka'ba* means literally 'cube'. It appears as a cube in shape and is considered the most holy site for Muslims, being the direction towards which they pray. Pilgrims circle the *Ka'ba* seven times when they first arrive in Mecca in the *tawaf al-Qudum* (the circuit of arrival). Likewise, they circle the *Ka'ba* before they leave Mecca, this is called *tawaf al-Wada'* (circuit of farewell).

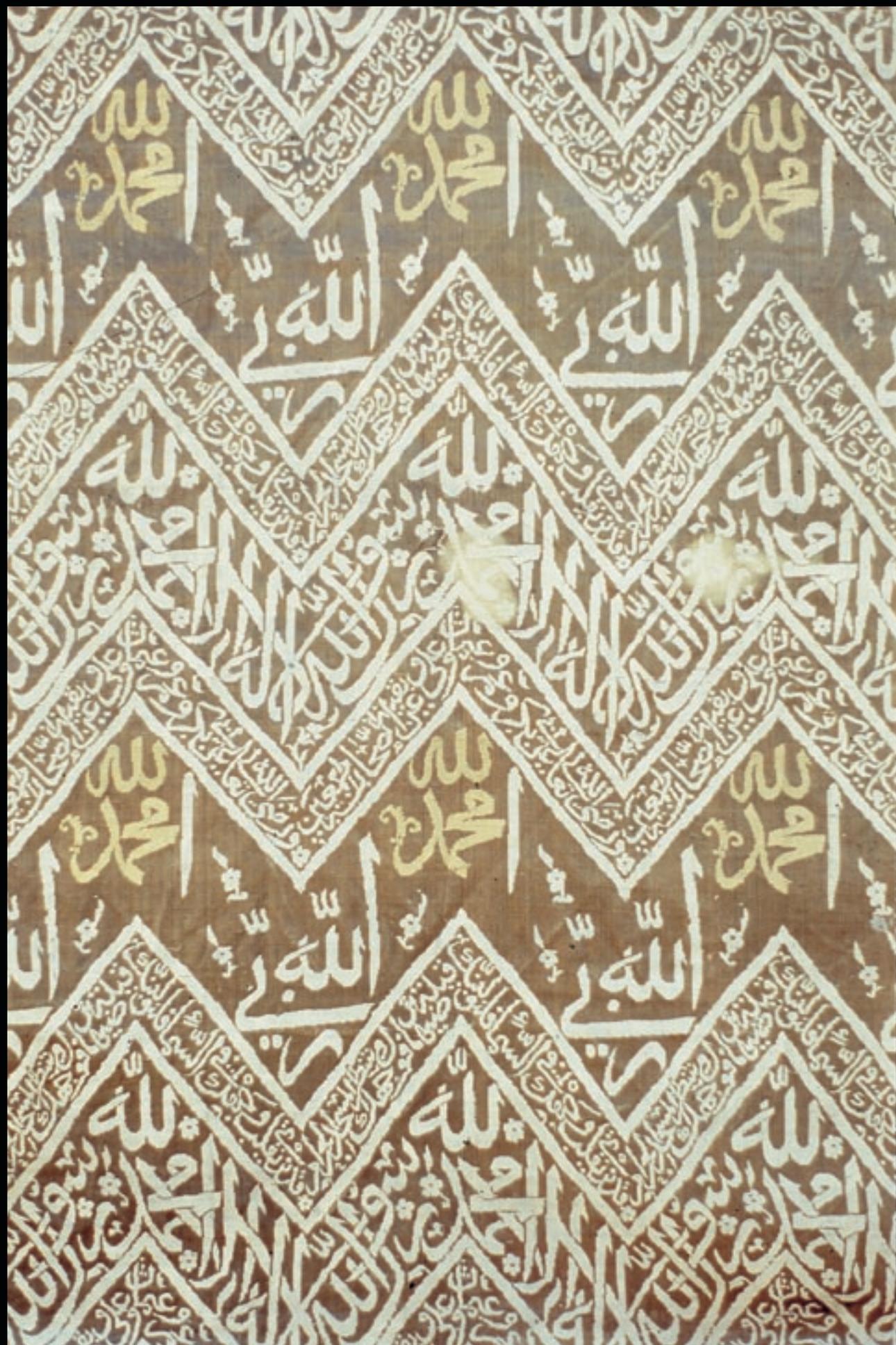
**'Wadi ghair dhi zara:** ('Valley where nothing grows'): the Qur'anic term to express the arid valley of Mecca.

**Al-Safaa and al-Marwah:** The two points in Mecca between which Hagar ran desperately searching for water for her son who was suffering from great thirst due to the extreme heat.

FACING PAGE

**Tomb cover**

Ottoman, AH 11th/AD 17th century  
Royal Museum, National Museums Scotland  
Edinburgh, United Kingdom





**Printing block**

Listing the holy places in the region of Palestine.

*Ottoman, AH 13th/AD 19th century*  
Islamic Museum and Al-Aqsa Library  
Jerusalem

*'Eid al-Adha*: A festival on the tenth day of Dhu al-Hijja, called variously, the Day of Immolation, the Great *Eid*, Festival of *Eid* or the Feast of Sacrifice. The legacy of this sacrifice goes back to the Prophet Abraham and is considered the most important festival for Muslims, marking the end of the *hajj* rituals.

**Rituals of the Hajj**

*The Intention*: A Muslim first makes known his or her intention of performing the religious duty of the *hajj*, and at his or her departure, heads towards Mecca.

*Al-Ihram*: This is a concept with physical and spiritual aspects. Firstly it comprises a body of specific rules regarding the physical appearance of the pilgrim. All sewn clothing is discarded and replaced by a piece of white cloth wrapped around the body. Hair on the head is either shaved or shortened. On a spiritual level these rules imply that the pilgrim is prepared to abstain from any behaviour that would nullify the benefits of the *hajj* such as killing or hunting.

*Al-Tawaf*: Circumambulation of the *Ka'ba* seven times at the time of arrival and departure.

*Al-Sa'y*: The ritual walk between al-Safaa and al-Marwah.

*Waqf* (Halt) at Mount Arafat: All pilgrims meet at the wide elevation in Mecca which is called Mount Arafat.

*Stone throwing*: This is the pelting of the symbols of evil (the devil) with small pebbles, the aim of which is to distance oneself from evil.

*Zamzam*: This is the well of Mecca, and the one continuous and permanent source of water. According to the Islamic tradition, the spring came forth by the power of Allah when the suckling thirsty infant, Ismail, struck the earth with his feet while his mother was looking for water. The water is considered holy and blessed by the pilgrims who carry quantities of it back home to give to family and friends.

*Leave-taking of the Pilgrims*: This is part of folk heritage which has been transformed into a national day. Special songs are sung on this day, which differ from country to country. It is usual for official representatives of the administration to take part in the departure of the *hajj* caravan, resembling the reception of the pilgrims when they return. In the past, the *hajj* caravan was received at the frontiers of provinces.

*Hajj Route or Road (darb al-hajj)*: This was a specific route that has changed at times and was taken by pilgrims from every corner of the Islamic world who were heading to Mecca. Usually all the necessary services were provided, especially security, by the administration. Caravans would come together at specified times in designated places, for example the Turkish caravan would meet with the caravan from al-Sham and they would travel together to join up later with the Jordanian and Palestinian caravans.

*Visit to Jerusalem*: It was common in early Islam to consider a visit to Jerusalem (al-Quds) as the pilgrimage of the less able, those who were not physically or financially equipped to make the journey to Mecca. Jerusalem is the first of the two *qiblas* and the third Holy City and is thus included in the holy triangle. Usually a visit to Jerusalem was included in the return trip, a trend that was widespread especially among people from Spain and North Africa (the Western Islamic World).

*'Umra*: *'Umra* is almost the same as the rituals of the *hajj* but takes place outside the *hajj* season. It includes a visit to all the holy places and is undertaken for all the religious shrines with the exception of Mount Arafat.

*Black Stone*: The black stone or rock that is considered to be the foundation stone of the *Ka'ba*. It is surrounded by a silver frame to protect it and many pilgrims go there to kiss it, imitating the action of the Prophet Muhammad.