

Travelling | Religious tourism and pilgrimage | Islamic pilgrimage

“And proclaim to the people the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass ...” (Qur'an 22:27)

The pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia, known to Muslims as the Hajj, is of the utmost importance to Islamic communities worldwide. A component of the Five Pillars of Islam, the Hajj is an exceptional experience undertaken by all physically able and financially capable Muslims at least once in their lifetime. Taking place every year from the 8th to the 12th day of Dhu al-Hijja (the Hajj month according to the Hijri calendar), the Hajj is first and foremost a religious occasion and a chance to meet in faith. At the same time, it also gives Muslims from all over the world the opportunity to trade and engage in intellectual and social activities. Over the centuries, Islamic rulers prided themselves in supporting all aspects of the Hajj. For over 400 years the Ottomans in particular exerted much effort in this regard, also facilitating the production of the Kiswa (the cover of the Ka'ba at the heart of the Holy Mosque in Mecca) and its transportation; it is conveyed within a special ceremonial tent (the Mahmal), as part of the official Hajj procession. At the same time, Ottoman rulers also took pride in maintaining and expanding the architecture of all the Holy Places, as well as honouring them with precious gifts, which included luxurious textile hangings for both the Ka'ba and the precinct of Mecca and the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina (Madinah). With the opening of the Hijaz Railway in 1908, at least part of the pilgrims' route was made easier, faster and more comfortable.



Working Number: UA 014

Name: Departure of a Caravan to Mecca from Bab el-Nasr Gate, Cairo

Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Late 19th / early 20th century

Materials: Watercolour

Curator Justification: Well into the early 20th century, most Muslim pilgrims still headed to Mecca on foot as part of a camel, horse and mule caravan. Cairo, which marked one of the most important starting points for pilgrim caravans heading towards Mecca, was particularly honoured due to the fact that it dispatched the ceremonial Mahmal containing a Qur'an manuscript and ritual hangings for the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina.



Working Number: TR2 108

Name: Convoy of pilgrims

Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date: 19th century

Materials: Photograph

Curator Justification: The establishment of the Hijaz Railway that ran from Damascus to Medina allowed much larger numbers of Muslim pilgrims to reach the Holy Places of Islam. Originally the plan had been to extend the railway line all the way to Mecca, but the project was stopped short due to the outbreak of World War I.



Working Number: TR2 109

Name: Convoy of pilgrims

Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date: 19th century

Materials: Photograph

Curator

Justification: Despite the modernisation of transport networks in the later 19th century the train journey to the Hijaz was still a lengthy one for Muslim pilgrims, many of whom spent several nights in makeshift camps specifically set up by the Ottoman authorities for the purpose along the railway line.



Working Number: FR 060

Name: The Ka'ba in Mecca

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1858–1859

Materials: -

Curator

Justification: This map, drawn by French traveller Émile Prisse d'Avennes (1807–79), gives a detailed impression of the annual pilgrimage undertaken by Muslims to the Ka'ba at Mecca. The work guided Westerners from afar in their intellectual discovery of the Holy City and allowed them to learn of the importance of the Ka'ba in the spiritual and ritual life of the Muslim community.



Working Number: UA 015

Name: The Religious Pilgrimage of the Mohammadans - Makkah (Arabia) - General View of the City, the Precinct and Enclosure of the Al-Haram Mosque and the Holy Kaaba

Holding Museum: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Published in La Illustración Española y Americana, April 15th, 1882

Materials: Engraving

Curator

Justification: This coloured engraving, made in Spain, depicts the large crowds of Muslim pilgrims visiting the Holy Mosque in Mecca and the Ka'ba during the Hajj season.



Working Number: UA 016

Name: Panoramic View of Makkah - Arabia (West Asia). Panoramic View of Makkah during the Celebration of the Pilgrimage of the Muslims to the Kaaba, where the religious treasure is guarded

Holding Museum: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Late 19th / early 20th century

Materials:

Curator

Justification:

Engraving

Long orderly queues of Muslim pilgrims converge on the Holy Mosque at Mecca, entering its precinct with the Holy Ka'ba at its heart. Muslims visit Mecca throughout the year for the 'Umra or lesser pilgrimage, but most importantly they come for Hajj, which is one of the five key duties in Islam and takes place in a particular month of the Islamic calendar, the Dhu al-Hijja.



Working Number: UK 061

Name: View of Mecca

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1803

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This view of Mecca was drawn by the Austrian Andreas Magnus Hunglinger, who accompanied the minister of the King of the Two Sicilies to Constantinople. Forbidden as a non-Muslim to visit Islam's Holy Places, Hunglinger based the image on a printed illustration in Ignace de Mouradja d'Ohsson's *Tableau General de l'Empire Ottoman*, published in 1781.



Working Number: UA 019

Name: Zamzam Water Bottle

Holding Museum: Sharjah Heritage Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Hegira late 13th – early 14th century / AD late 19th – early 20th century

Materials: Tinned copper alloy

Curator Justification:

All pilgrims to the Holy City of Mecca will make a point of drinking and collecting water from the sacred Well of Zamzam, located near the Ka'ba within the precinct of the Holy Mosque in Makkah al-Mukarramah. The never-ceasing flow of the Well is considered a miracle by Muslims, and its properties are believed to aid good health and well-being. Under the Ottoman Caliph 'Abd al-Hamid II (Abdülhamid II), in AH 1333/AD 1915, the Well was relocated away from the area where pilgrims perform their circumambulations of the Ka'ba.



Working Number: UK 059

Name: Water bottle

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: Acquired in 1883

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Known in Arabic as 'Zamzamiyya', flasks and bottles like this one have been used by Muslims

for centuries to collect Zamzam water. Revered for its spiritual and health-related properties, pilgrims drink Zamzam water while at Mecca and then make every effort to collect some more to take home to share with family and friends.



Working Number: FR 068

Name: Travels in the Red Sea. The Temple of Medina

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1854

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This bird's-eye view shows the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina surrounded by pilgrims approaching from all directions. Most Muslims on pilgrimage to Mecca make every effort to visit Medina as well.



Working Number: UA 020

Name: Hanging (sitara) for the Mosque of the Prophet, Medina al-Munawwarah

Holding Museum: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Hegira mid 13th century / AD mid 19th century

Materials: Silk, cotton, silver and gilt silver metal thread

Curator Justification: Traditionally, the interior walls of the Shrine of the Prophet in the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina were covered with elaborate hangings. The Ottoman sultans sent new hangings on the occasion of their ascension and also when the textiles needed replacing. The used hangings were then returned to Istanbul, where often they were used to cover the tombs of sultans, or distributed among nobles and dignitaries.



Working Number: UA 021

Name: Hanging (sitara) for the Mosque of the Prophet, Medina al-Munawwarah

Holding Museum: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Hegira mid 13th century / AD mid 19th century

Materials: Silk, cotton, silver and gilt silver thread

Curator Justification: Traditionally, the interior walls of the Shrine of the Prophet in the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina were covered with elaborate hangings. The Ottoman sultans sent new hangings on the occasion of their ascension and also when the textiles needed replacing. The used hangings were then returned to Istanbul, where often they were used to cover the tombs of sultans, or distributed among nobles and dignitaries.



Working Number: UA 022

Name: Hanging (sitara) for the Mosque of the Prophet, Medina al-Munawwarah

Holding Museum: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation /Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Hegira 1321 / AD 1903

Materials: Silk, cotton, silver and silver gilt metal thread

Curator Justification: Traditionally, the interior walls of the Shrine of the Prophet in the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina were covered with elaborate hangings. The Ottoman sultans sent new hangings on the occasion of their ascension and also when the textiles needed replacing. The used hangings were then returned to Istanbul, where often they were used to cover the tombs of sultans, or distributed among nobles and dignitaries.



Working Number: UK 060

Name: Seal

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: Acquired 1878

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This seal, inscribed with a prayer, was owned at one time by a Muslim who had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. Having experienced the Hajj, the individual would be honoured with the title Hajji. Traditionally, Qur'anic verses or Islamic prayers accompanied believers wherever they went, either written on paper and contained in a special pendant or container, or inscribed onto semi-precious or precious stones, as in this case, where the intention is to remember God and have His word and blessings ever present.



Working Number: UK 058

Name: Water flask

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: c. 1853

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Known in Arabic as a "Zamzamiyya", flasks and bottles like this one to collect Zamzam water have been used by Muslim pilgrims for many centuries. Revered for its spiritual and health-related properties, pilgrims drink Zamzam water while at Mecca and then make every effort to collect some more to take home to share with family and friends.