The divine revelation as it is now embodied in the Qur'an, the 'Holy Recitation', is divided into two categories, the parts that were revealed in Makkah and those that were sent down in Medina. Makkah and immediate surroundings are the focus of the yearly pilgrimage, one of Islam's five pillars, and Medina's sacred places are visited by vast numbers of believers.

In both the human and the sacred geography of Islam the two places play an important role. This can be gathered from illustrations in Islamic manuscripts. Sometimes Makkah is depicted there as the very centre of the world (figure 1), which one should interpret as its having a central place in Islamic thought, rather than as being in the geographical centre of the world. The focal function of the Ka'ba is sometimes emphasized in the illustrations in manuscripts by a circle (figure 2) which in all directions of the compass contains the names of the towns, regions and countries from where the believers perform their daily ritual prayer, using God's House as their orientation point.

Medina too has been depicted in many ways in the manuscript literature. And here, as in the images of Makkah, we see sometimes iconographical elements, however schematically drawn, that serve to evoke to reader and viewer alike, the idea of the sacred locations of Islam. They are not meant to describe these holy places, but serve another purpose. By force of association they strengthen the bond between the believer and the sacred grounds of his religion.

In images of Makkah, we see, of course, a representation of the Ka'ba, sometimes also the walls of the Great Mosque, the minarets, the many gates which are sometimes even given their names. And we see such images in all degrees of sophistication, from very simple to most elaborate, from sketchy to detailed and colourful, usually in a two-dimensional projection but sometimes even drawn in perspective.

Apart from illustrations on paper there is an iconography of Makkah on other materials (tile and ceramic) as well. Such images of Makkah and the books of which they are part are not meant to be pilgrim guides. Yet, the numerous manuscripts of the work Futūh al-Haramayn by the Persian author al-Libri (d. 1526 CE) can indeed be read as an account of the pilgrimage to Makkah and Medina (figure 3). Tiles and similar images on leaves of paper probably served as souvenirs to be purchased by pilgrims (figure 4).

This was important in a period in which the culture of the image was not as advanced as it has become nowadays. But the pilgrim's guide, a genre (Manasik al-Hajj) which indeed exists in Islam, is usually devoid of illustrations and prescribes to the pilgrim how to move, and where to say which prayers, so that the ritual is validly performed. With
the many manuscripts of the prayer book Dalâl al-Khayrât (‘A Guide to Happiness’), written by the Moroccan mystic and activist Muhammad b. Sulaymân al-Jazâ‘î (died c. 1465 CE), this is a different. The numerous manuscripts which exist of this text often include illustrations of Medina and later also of Makkah.

Its author, al-Jazâ‘î, lived in a time of political upheaval. The kingdom of Morocco was torn by civil strife and the threats of the Portuguese, who invaded the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of the country and caused much suffering. Al-Jazâ‘î founded a branch of the Shâhidîyya Ta‘â‘ī which tried to bring back order in chaos.

An effective resistance against the Portuguese was organised. Zâwiya’s Maghreb and West African term for an Islamic religious school or monastery) from Tierncon (north-east of Morocco, now in Algeria) on the Mediterranean to well into the Wadi Draa in the South-West of the country were populated by al-Jazâ‘î’s followers who divided their time, so to speak, between mystical contemplation with pious ritual on the one hand and with fighting the unbelievers on the other.

It is probable that al-Jazâ‘î composed his prayer book in order to give his followers a liturgical text that, when collectively recited, increased the internal coherence of the group. This apparently worked out well and the prayer book Dalâl al-Khayrât in the course of time gained an immense popularity, soon transcending the geographical boundaries of Morocco and finding its way East, all over the Sunnī world.

The great variety of manuscripts, from the very simple to examples of highly developed book art, shows that the book also became widespread in all social strata of Islamic society. This popularity continues today, and the Dalâl al-Khayrât is recited from court circles in Morocco to hadith sessions as far East as Java in Indonesia, from Central Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa. The number of manuscripts of the text in private and public collections must count in many thousands, and the spread of printing in the world of Islam has added innumerable editions and commentaries to the existing manuscripts.

The structure of the prayers is of the Ta‘â‘ī type, the imploring by the believer of blessings on the Prophet Muhammad, a way of praying which is sanctioned by the Qur‘ânic, in Sûrat al-‘Azârâb, ëîïà

56. The main body of the prayer book consists of communal lituries (Azwâd) to be said on specific days of the week (eight in total, from Monday through Monday). Important basic materials for these prayers are the epithets of the Prophet Muhammad (Asmâ al-Nabî), of which al-Jazâ‘î compiled list of 201 from a great variety of sources, and which he reproduces in the introduction of his prayer book. Another subject in the introduction of the work is a short description of the burial chamber inside the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, and this is where the illustrations come in.

It is this description which has given rise to the first set of illustrations in al-Jazâ‘î’s prayer book. These represent the basilica chamber in the mosque in Medina (al-Rawâd al-Mubâraka) itself, which is usually depicted, in various degrees of graphical sophistication, in the form of a niche with a lamp, under which the position of the graves of the Prophet Muhammad and of the first two caliphs, Abû Bakr and Umar, are indicated (figures 5 and 6). Sometimes the grave of the Prophet’s daughter Fatîma is added, usually somewhat separated from the three other graves.

Illustrations of this type are nothing but a graphical expansion of the text. It seems that the short description of the burial chamber had invited, if one may say so, the illuminators of the manuscripts of the Dalâl al-Khayrât to show the burial chamber, not in a naturalistic way, but with a simple design in a flat projection, with a symbolic representation of the essential elements of this most holy part in the Medina mosque. This is the first shift in the illustration pattern in the Dalâl al-Khayrât, from a non-illustrated to an illustrated book.

The second shift must have started shortly afterwards, already in the early sixteenth century. Suddenly the single illustration of al-Rawâd al-Mubâraka, the burial chamber in the mosque of Medina, is expanded by a second illustration, now of the pulpit (minbar) and sometimes with the prayer niche (mihrâb) as well, apparently in the same mosque (figures 7 and 8).

The illustration is easy enough to interpret, yet it presence there causes a problem. Why are the pulpit and the prayer niche shown here? They are not described in the text of the Dalâl al-Khayrât, whereas the burial chamber is indeed mentioned. Why then is there this second illustration, if it is not solicited by text in al-Jazâ‘î’s prayer book? If the answer to this question is not found in the prayer book, one should therefore look outside it and find an authoritative text in which both the grave of the Prophet Muhammad and his pulpit are mentioned, and which may have served as an inspiration to the illuminators.
It did not prove to be very difficult to find such a text in the Hadith, the Prophetic Tradition, where it is said, in the Sahih of al-Bukhari and in other canonical collections that the Prophet Muhammad has said: 'Whoever stands between my grave and my pulpit, it is as if he is standing in the Gardens of Paradise.' It is evident that the illustrators have added to the value of the prayer book, by providing an extra element which is not a graphical expression of the text, but which adds a pious implication by putting the reader in a place (figure 9) where he can imagine himself to be standing in nothing less than 'the Gardens of Paradise.' It is a brilliant invention.

For the North African manuscripts of al-Jazuli's Dalail al-Khayrat the illustration pattern stops here. But for the manuscripts of the prayer book which were made further to the East, Egypt, Turkey, Central Asia, India, South-East Asia, there is yet another development ahead. Suddenly, and I date this more or less in the second half of the eighteenth century, there appears an entirely different pattern of illustrations in the copies of the Dalail al-Khayrat.

We still see the mosque in Medina, with burial chamber, pulpit, prayer niche and all its other iconographical elements, on the one hand, but this is now preceded by an image of the Great Mosque of Makkah. It is an attractive double image (figure 10) in the manuscripts of the prayer book, but once more it poses the problem: 'Why is this image of Makkah added here?'

Although Makkah is an overall important place, it is not mentioned in the Dalail al-Khayrat at all. Why then nevertheless that image of Makkah? The same line of reasoning as employed in order to find an explanation for the previous shift of illustration patterns can be used here. Namely by assuming that if the illustration does not visualise a passage in the text, it must be the representation of something which is outside the text, but nevertheless important.

If that is so, it suffices to look for it, and to do so more or less in the same way as we did when searching for an idea or concept that could have caused the addition of the Prophet's pulpit and prayer niche. The new shift in the illustrations; by the addition of an image of the Great Mosque of Makkah to that of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (figure 11), could provisionally be dated as to have taken place after the middle of the eighteenth century. I have not seen any dated manuscript of the Dalail al-Khayrat with Makkah-Medina double image from before the second half of the eighteenth century, yet I cannot exclude there are indeed earlier ones. Maybe the period in which this change in illustrations took place can give an explanation.

The eighteenth century was a period in which important ideological and religious reform movements in Islam emerged, several of which still exist today. One of the best known of these is the Wahhabi movement, and the Kitab al-Tawhid by founder Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab comes to mind as a possible source of or cause for the change in illustration patterns in the manuscripts of Dalail al-Khayrat. Anything that diverts the believer's attention from God is considered polytheism.
It may well have been that the rather exclusive focus on the Taslîlî of the Prophet Muhammad had become offensive to the more austere believer. The depiction of the grave of the Prophet may have become offensive as well, as it suggests a habit of visiting graves. Whatever may have caused the inclusion of an image of the Great Mosque of Makkah in al-Jazîlî’s prayer book, it might be considered as an ideological correction of too exclusive a focus on the Prophet Muhammad.

With the Makkah-Medina double image ends the final shift in illustration patterns in the Dalîl al-Khayrât. These illustrations (figure 12) can be seen in the printed edition of the prayer book as well, but there is a tendency, especially in the more modern editions, to omit the illustrations in the introductory part altogether. With that the presentation of the prayer book has come full circle, and those unillustrated modern printed edition look in many ways just like the unillustrated earliest manuscripts of the work. In between those points in time lies a period of some 500 years during which thousands of copies of the Dalîl al-Khayrât were made, many of a high artistic quality, all expressing a deep and pious belief in Islam and a great respect and love for its Prophet.

Figure 1: Illustration in a Turkish manuscript, dated 1390/1600. MS Leiden, Or. 12,365, f. 10b.

Figure 2: Manuscript from Istanbul, dated 1470/1553. MS Leiden, Or. 5, f. 17a.

Figure 3: al-Lâ‘în, Fârid al-Hârîmî, MS Leiden Or. 11,079, f. 38b (1012/1603).

Figure 4: Iznik tiles, middle of the 16th century. Benaki Museum, Athens.

Figure 5: Manuscript of Dalîl al-Khayrât from Morocco, 18th century. MS Leiden, Or. 23,723, f. 10b.

Figure 6: Manuscript of Dalîl al-Khayrât, from Banten (West Java), 18th century. MS Leiden, Or. 7057a, f. 13b.


Figure 8: From a manuscript from Najaf, West Sumatra, Indonesia, dated 1229/1814. Prayer book of Imam Bunjil. MS Leiden Or. 1751, f. 183a.

Figure 9: Under the cupola the ‘Blessed Garden’, the groves of the prophet and his first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar. Slightly separated: The grave of Fathimi. At the right: the pulpit (minbar) of the Prophet, al-Lâ‘în, Fârid al-Hârîmî, MS Leiden Or. 11,079, f. 13b (1012/1603).


Figure 11: The mosques of Makkah and of Medina. Miniature in a manuscript of the Dalîl al-Khayrât, from Najaf (West Sumatra), dated 1229/1814. Prayer book of the famous Imam Bunjil. MS Leiden Or. 7351, ff. 48b-48a.

Figure 12: The mosques of Makkah and of Medina. Miniature in a manuscript of the Dalîl al-Khayrât, possibly by Fathi or Gatsuji, 14th century. MS Leiden Or. 14,276, ff. 70b-71a.

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Hadeeth ad-Dar is a publication of the Dar al-Atlhar al-Islamiyyah. Every year, the Dar al-Atlhar al-Islamiyyah organises a series of lectures known as the Cultural Season. Hadeeth ad-Dar was created to share these lectures with academic and cultural institutions and Friends of the Dar al-Atlhar al-Islamiyyah around the world. Cultural Season 15 will get underway in October 2009 and, as with previous years, will present scholars in a wide variety of fields related to arts and culture in the Islamic world.

The Dar al-Atlhar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is a government cultural organisation based on a Kuwaiti private art collection. Since its inception in 1983, DAI has grown from a single focus organisation created to manage the loan of the prestigious al-Sabah Collection of art from the Islamic world to the State of Kuwait to become an internationally recognised cultural organisation.

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