A Collection of Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Hajj Certificates

Şule Aksoy and Rachel Milstein

In 1893, during the reconstruction works undertaken after a devastating fire, a large collection of written documents was found in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. The thousands of parchment and paper leaves and scrolls, mostly in fragmentary condition, which had suffered from heat and humidity, were sent by the Ottoman administration, then in control of Syria, to be treated in Istanbul. There they remained, being kept in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art (TIEM).

In 1963 and 1964 the French scholars Janine Sourdel-Thomine and Dominique Sourdel were invited to examine this material, and they consequently published a preliminary report on the collection, and a series of studies, mainly of a historical nature.1 According to their classification, the treasure consisted of fragmentary Qur’ans, collections of prayers, juridical and theological texts, pilgrimage certificates, profane literature such as grammars and poetry, personal documents, medical prescriptions, and talismanic papers.

The Earliest Hajj documents, which date to the Seljukide and Bouride periods (from the eleventh to the late twelfth centuries) were published in full, with a detailed description and a historical study of each document, including the text in Arabic and in French translation.2 This

1 The first, preliminary description of the collection is in Janine Sourdel-Thomine and Dominique Sourdel, “Nouveaux documents sur l’histoire religieuse et sociale de Damas au Moyen Âge,” Revue des Études Islamiques 32 (1964), pp. 1-25. These were followed by a series of papers of a historical nature.

2 D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine, “Une collection médiévale de certificats de pèlerinage à la Mekke conservés à Istanbul. Les actes de la période seljoukide et
important publication, and the inventory drawn up of the complete lot of Hajj rolls by the two scholars are the point of departure for the present paper, which we consider as an accompaniment to their two forthcoming publications on the Hajj certificates of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

In this paper we do not intend to solve the many problems presented by the fascinating and enigmatic material from Damascus. We shall only attempt a general description of the documents, emphasizing some artistic and technical aspects of the ensemble. This, with the adjoined illustrations, may offer scholars a renewed encounter with a scarcely known, but important phenomenon of medieval Islamic art. While concentrating our attention on the pilgrimage rolls, we can not ignore mentioning a comparable group of documents within the same treasure—a few dozen talismanic rolls, which share certain technical, formal and iconographical characteristics with the former group.

The lot of Hajj certificates consists of some 150 paper rolls (rotoli), mostly in fragmentary condition; some are no more than small remnants of the large originals. The earliest dated document is from 476/1084, the latest from 710/1310, and most of the others can be fairly safely attributed, on grounds of composition, calligraphy, and painting style, to consecutive stages between these two termini. A further subdivision into dated groups shows two chronological peaks: one in the Seljuk, and the other in the early Ayyubid rule of Damascus. These highlights are represented by a larger number of documents, a better quality of execution, and a greater elaboration of the visual aspect. A pictorial innovation took place at the end of the twelfth century, when schematic illustrations of holy stations visited along the journey were inserted into the rolls, between the lines of text. These colourful and sophisticated compositions, abundant in the first part of the thirteenth century, were reduced in both number and visual importance during the following, Mamluk period.

The text of the rolls, stylized as a legal or a juridical document, certifies in the name of witnesses whose signatures are inscribed at the foot, that a certain person (whose name is given) has executed the minor or the major pilgrimage (‘umra or hajj), or both. He/She visited the places bourses (jusqu’à 549/1154),” in Études Médiévales et Patrimoine Turc, ed. J. Sourdell-Thorins, Collection Culture et Civilisations Médiévalas, 1 (Paris, 1983), pp. 167–273.

1 We wish to thank Janine and Dominique Sourdell for giving us access to their early notes and films, and encouraging us to approach this material anew.

4 A stylistic evolution in the earlier part of the collection is suggested in the Sourdels’ paper of 1983, “Une collection médiévale.”

5 Legally, only one person could be substituted for in one journey, and only by a proxy who had already performed a pilgrimage for himself. (Ibid., “Nouveaux documents,” p. 4. See also El, s.xv. “Badj” [A.J. Wessinik]).

6 The French traveller Chardin, although writing much later than our documents, describes the practice of suspending certificates and images of Mecca on the walls of mosques. This may have been the origin of ceramic tiles with illustrations of the Ka’bah in Ottoman mosques. On this question see M. Reinaud, Description des monuments musulmans du cabinet de M. Le Duc de Blacas (Paris, l’Imprimerie royale, 1828), vol. 2, p. 310.

mentioned and performed the rites for his/her own sake, or for the sake of a third party, whose name is also specified, who had died or was unable to take upon himself/herself the long and fatiguing journey. This practice of Hajj substitution was authorized by jurists, but is hardly recorded in the literary sources.

Almost all the certificates in the collection represent cases of substitution, some of them for the most eminent figures in the history of Syria of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, including a few Ayyubid sultans. The royal certificates are naturally more elaborate than the others, which were purchased by less wealthy, anonymous patrons, but whatever the artistic considerations and the long titles and blessings attached to the rulers’ names, the text in the various certificates is remarkably homogeneous.

The documents from the Ayyubid period are distinguished in detail from both the earlier and the later examples. Generally, either the upper or the lower part of the individual roll is conserved, probably that end which was inside the rolled document, and thus better protected. The original size varies considerably, from around 20 cm to half a meter in width, and up to some 210 cm in length. Due to the fragmentary condition of most of these documents, their original length can only be estimated, based on proportional deduction, as is demonstrated in the latter part of this paper.

The evolution of such big and heavy documents, with their large and sumptuous illustrations, raises the question of function. There is literary testimony to a practice of hanging Hajj certificates and schematic or symbolic images of the haramayn on the wall of mosques. Our fragments confirm this possibility in manifesting remnants of either a solid support or a frame. In some instances the whole back of the roll is covered with large brush strokes of a fluid substance, apparently a glue, now aubergine in colour. Flakes of some solid material, 1–2 mm thick, that was glued to the complete roll, can still be discerned. In other
instances the edges of the document were reinforced by a frame which was glued, stitched, or pinned to the paper, and is now evidenced by the different colouring of the paper around the edges, by brush strokes with glue, or a series of small holes regularly spaced.

Meant to be displayed in public, and to serve the prestige of the bāji even if he had gained the title thanks to the paid services of a substitute pilgrim, the certificates grew in size and artistic elaboration. They are all inscribed in black ink, which in the more luxurious specimens is interspersed with red or gold. The bismillāh inscriptions at the head of the documents become bigger and display an array of calligraphic styles.

From at least as early as 589/1193, illustrations of the holy places on the Hajj route replaced the large calligraphy on many of the certificates. The text, stripped of the large Qur'anic citations, was reduced to groups of one to three lines, in small letters, squeezed between the illustrations. The entire surface of the roll was thus divided into a vertical series of paintings, with a big bismillāh at the head, bands of text in between, and sometimes a decorative border around three edges, the long sides and the top. The lower end remained open, either to leave space for the witnesses' signatures, or as a result of technical difficulties, which are discussed below.

The individually framed images of the holy sites are drawn in a highly schematic style, and painted in various combinations of four or five colours from the following gamut: red, pink, brick, brown, ochre, orange, yellow, several shades of green, turquoise, blue, gray, black, and silver (now oxidized). The chromatic effect of the roll can be dull, when the dominant colours are bottle-green and brown, or cheerful, if red, pink, yellow, and light blue are put together. We could not establish any relationship between colour combinations and other subdivisions, for example by date or technique.

The Illustrations

Whatever the nature of the pilgrimage, be it bāji or 'umra, all the Ayyubid rolls present a full cycle of illustrations. They depict, from top to bottom, the major stations of the Hajj including, at the end, the Prophet's mosque in Medina, and the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem.

[Figures 1–4]

1 The earliest dated fragment with illustrations, inv. no. 53/3, is of this date.
All the pilgrims gather in the plain of ‘Arafat on the ninth of Dhul-Hijja, to perform the central ceremony of the Hajj, the *waqf* (*waqfa* in the certificates, meaning “standing”). They stand and pray until sunset, and listen (even if they cannot hear) the preacher’s sermon after midday. The khāfīf’s pulpit, at that time, was located in a ruined mosque on the plain, believed to have been built by Abraham (C 6), not far from the isolated Jabal al-Rahma, called also Jabal ‘Arafa (B 3). This mountain, which at that time had not yet become a focal point in the ritual, nevertheless assumed gigantic dimensions in the illustrations. It is depicted in the form of a truncated pyramid, covered with scales in a colour pattern that recalls carpets of a later dates.8

Flights of stairs on the slopes of the mountain, going up from the “mountain’s gates” (A 4) are lit by rows of candles. Another candle, and a hanging lamp inside a domed structure on top of the mountain (B 1), reflect the lighting devices that, according to Khusrav’s description, could be seen from afar. Two black banners beside the *qubba* represent the Abbassid dynasty, and the white inscription embroidered on them consists of the *ahādīn* and the name of the ruling calif. This is the name of al-Nasir li-dīn Allāh (575/1180–622/1225), except in one case of the last Abbassid calif, al-Musta’sīm bi-Allāh 640/1241–656/1258). The califs’ names help us date the incomplete fragments.

The plain of ‘Arafat, at the foot of the mountain, is framed by two banners raised on posts or pillars (*‘alam*, B 5), which mark the bounds of the *baraw*. Between them are the old mosque of Abraham, with the *minbar al-khafif*, a pool of water (B 7), and the mythical tomb of Adam (B 8). A rectangle above the pool, identified as a door (*bahr*), suggests that the place was covered, although it is depicted from a bird’s-eye view as an open basin. The combination of the scalloped pool with the rectangular door recalls a common motif in a certain category of Ottoman prayer rugs, mistakenly called “key hole” in modern research. Some of the thirteenth century painters, misunderstanding the model or wishing to embellish the monument, depicted it as a flower, a vase, or a hanging lamp.

---

8 Nasiri Khusrav wrote a picturesque description of the ritual and the monuments. See, in particular, p. 81.
Plate 1: A roll painted by hand, from 602/1205-6, now in two fragments. (TrIM, inv. no. 1737 and 4746)

Plate 2: A complete, unillustrated roll from 594/1198. (TrIM, inv. no. 4752)
Muzdalifa

After sunset, marching quickly or running between the posts, the pilgrims leave ‘Arafat and move towards Muzdalifa, to spend the night there. A mosque called al-mash'ar al-harâm, at the raised eastern end of the valley, was in fact nothing but an enclosing wall, decorated with many crenellations, and an open air mihrâb (C 1), which in the illustrations is often identified as bâb. Steps over an arch led to a higher level, serving as a background for lighting devices (C 2).9

Another building (B 4) is identified as “the domes of Muzdalifa” (qibâb). Looking like a hypostyle hall, without any religious particularities, it may have been a sunken structure, sanctified by age, the meaning of which escaped the painters. This monument is surrounded by four water tanks or wells (abâr), depicted as circles divided by colours into four or six sections, much like modern life-savers.

Minâ

The valley of Minâ is basically one long passage, where the pilgrims throw stones at three pillars or piles (janâra), popularly known as satans (D 1). This ritual is performed during the three days that follow the sacrifice (ayûm al-tashriq), in commemoration of Abraham stoning Satan. After the ritual, which in the illustrations takes place in the “mosque of the sacrifice” (masjîd nafrm al-kâbsh, D 3), the pilgrim emerges partially from the state of iḥrâm.

Minâ is the scene of exchange of goods between pilgrims from all over the Muslim world; indeed, the biggest bazaar of the world. It was concentrated around a row of shops, which may be represented here by the line of domes (qibâb Minâ, D 2). On the other hand, the monument on the right side (D 4) is a mosque, masjîd al-kâbsh, built near the foot of the mountain that encircles the valley. It was an exceptionally large mosque, with a square minaret erected in the centre of the open court.10

---


10 Ibid.
The Holy Mosque in Mecca

This is not only the largest illustration in the cycle, but also the most detailed one, because every part of this enclosure is symbolically charged and an object of adoration. The composition is divided into three: the upper band depicting the monumental Bāb-‘Ibrāhīm (E 3), a minaret (E 1), the Madrasa Mālikīyya and Madrasa Shāfi‘īyya (E 2 and 4) and another domed structure (E 5), all of them adjacent to the western wall of the mosque.

In the main section the Ka‘ba (F 1) is surrounded by concentric rings of monuments. The internal ring starts from the harām (F 2)—a small wall enclosing the presumed tombs of Ishmael and his mother. On the left of the Ka‘ba are: a movable staircase on wheels (F 3), which is rolled to the raised door of the Ka‘ba during the visit; the pavilion of the well of Zamzam (F 4); maqṣār Ḥabīb (F 5)—the final point of the circuit of circumambulation, protecting a stone on which Abraham is said to have set his foot; and the “dome of drinking” (qubbat al-sharab, F 6)—probably another name for siyābak ‘Abbās or al-qubbat al-‘Abbāzīyya of medieval literature, which sheltered a Qur‘ān from the year 194 A.H.11 Below the Ka‘ba are a small arch between two candles (F 7) and a complex minbar (F 8). The arch is most probably bāb al-shayba, through which many pilgrims in our certificates are described as having entered the musollah, the space of circumambulation.12

In the second ring, near the arcaded enclosure walls, four rectangular installations are seen, with lamps suspended from their flat roofs. These may be the raised platforms of the four ināms (F 9). Squaeezes between them and the four minarets at the corners (F 10), are tall torches, shaped like street-lamps (F 11).

A third section depicts the mas’ā (trotting space), along which the pilgrims go to and fro seven times, pacing between the green posts (G 3). The mas’ūā stretches between the arched monument of Marwa (G 5) and the triple arch of saḥīl (G 2) at the foot of Mt. Abū Qubays (G 1). A domed monument along the road is identified as qubbat ‘Umar (G 4).

12 About the clan of Banī Shayba, the guardians of the Ka‘ba, and the history of this gate, see Nasser-E Khamsawi’s Book of Travels (Safarnama), translated with introduction and annotation by W.M. Thackston Jr. (New York, 1989), p. 79.

Medina

Having completed the Hajj, the pilgrims head to Medina, to pay a visit to the Prophet’s house, mosque, and tomb. The illustration of this composite mosque is split into two bands: the covered hall and tomb, and the open court. In the upper, roofed part, we see the pentagonal mausoleum with the tombs of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ‘Umar (H 1), next to a small space with a grilled wall, called mībrāb Fātima (H 2). The prayer hall, called al-rawda (H 3), is decorated with two-coloured vertical bands, probably the coloured marble columns of the Umayyad structure, and is topped by a narrow passage with a row of hanging lamps (H 5). This is a half open corridor at the qibla side of the hall, through which the pilgrims enter the mosque, and circumambulate the tomb chamber.

The open court in the lower half of the composition is surrounded by four arcades, one of which probably represents the entrance wall to the rawda. In the court, between, the palms trees of Medina, we see the tall qubbat al-zāyf, a room for storing wax and oil for lighting (H 6).

Jerusalem

This bāram, too, is divided into two zones, but without separating texts. The large and very decorative “dome of the temple” (qubbat al-maqdis, I 1) in the upper zone is framed by two minarets (I 2); in some rolls it is completely unrelated to the five elements below. These elements, in a symmetrical arrangement, are the rock, with a footprint of the Prophet (I 5), an olive tree (I 6), the cradle of Jesus (I 4), the mībrāb of Zachariah (I 7), and a mībrāb identified either with the mosque of al-Aqāq or with King David (I 3).

The inclusion of Jerusalem in the Hajj certificates, and the enigmatic details of the iconography, pose many questions regarding the historical background of the rolls and the sources influencing their art.13 Not only Jerusalem, but the whole cycle of illustrations in these certificates, perhaps the earliest known depictions of the holy places, is an extremely interesting phenomenon, and deserves careful study. While we hope to pursue our investigation further in the future, we would like to

present here the results of a survey of two material aspects—the making of the paper rolls, and the technique of block printing.

The Making of the Rolls

The introduction of an illustrative cycle at the end of the twelfth century required a longer surface, hence a modification in the ratio between length and width. Until then, the rolls had been made of two sheets of paper glued together to form a vertical rectangle.

Down to the early Ayyubid period the sheets, measuring about 56 cm long and 40.5–42 cm wide, are of fine and rather light off-white paper, with clear, vertical equally spaced laid 5 or 6 lines to 1 cm. But from the last decade of the twelfth century and at least until the early Mamluk period, the paper used is thicker, darker, and often split into two layers. The laid lines, 7–10 to 1 cm, are seen only on the face (the inscribed and illustrated side) of the roll, and only faintly. Another kind of paper, in which laid lines are not seen at all, was also used, in the same workshop, as in the case of two rolls with identical stamped illustrations, one made of paper with visible laid lines, and the other without them.

The sheets of these thicker papers measure about 72 cm long and 52 cm wide, the size determined by the mould frame, and the laid lines are parallel to the long sides of the sheet. These dimensions are deduced from the longest sheets in a few almost complete rolls, and the placing of joins (the meeting points of two adjacent sheets) within the illustrative cycle. In most of the rolls of a given size the placing of the joins corresponds to a certain pictorial element, for example the lower end of Muzdalifa, the dividing line between Báb Ibrāhīm and the Ka‘ba, or the riviš cutting through the middle of the Prophet’s mosque in Medina. Since the size of incomplete illustrations can be reconstructed because they are symmetrical and keep to rather constant proportions, a fragment

---

14 One example, from 506 A.H., is made of three sheets. (Inv. 4087)
15 For example, inv. no. 4087 from 506 A.H.; inv. no. 4787 from 537 A.H. Laid lines, like water marks, reflect the grid upon which the paper pulp/dough dries out in the mould. Oriental paper around the Mediterranean has laid lines, sometimes in rhythmically patterned groups. Paper from the eastern lands of Islam does not have these lines. See a forthcoming article, with extensive bibliography, by Geneviève Humbert, “Papiers non filigranés au proche-orient jusqu’en 1450, essai de typologie.”
16 Inv. no. 4748 and 4743.
17 A complete sheet, between two joins of a roll (unillustrated, inv. no. 4622) from 654 A.H., measures 71 x 51 cm. The long side of an almost complete sheet at the head of an illustrated roll (inv. no. 4743) is 62 x 34 cm.
Plate 3: A fragment of a small printed roll. (TfEM, inv. no. 4742)

Plate 4: Head of a large roll, painted by hand. (TfEM, inv. no. 4739)
with incomplete parts of the illustrative cycle, and with a join, can indicate something about the size of the roll and the number of sheets constituting it. Based on these parameters, and on the direction of the laid lines which is uniform in each individual roll, we can subdivide the Ayyubid specimens into four groups by size.

1. Only one certificate represents the smallest size group. It is an almost complete roll from 608 A.H., with estimated original dimensions of 112–115 cm in length and 23.5 cm in width, which gives a ratio of 5.1:1 (fig. I, inv. no. 4091). It consists of two long sheets 52 cm in length, and a small incomplete one, of 9–10 cm. The laid lines are horizontal (parallel to the narrow edges of the roll), and the joins are in the middle of Mecca and the middle of Jerusalem. Another narrow certificate, 24 cm wide, should be considered as belonging to the next group, on account of the placement of the joins and the direction of the laid lines.

2. This subdivision, slightly bigger, contains three rolls measuring 24, 25, and 26.5 cm in width.18 In all of them, the laid lines run downward, parallel to the long sides of the roll. From a join in the middle of Mecca, and three almost complete sheets measuring at least 60 cm, we can reconstruct a model of about 130–140 x 26 cm, with a ratio of 4.5–5.1.

3. All the thirteen illustrated specimens of the third group are dated to the reign of the caliph al-Mam al-Nasir li-Din Allah (between 575/1180 and 622/1225), or depict his name on the banners of Mt. Arafat.19 The preserved joins are all at the bottom of Muzdalifah, which defines one third of the illustrative cycle, including the bismillah. It is clear then, that these rolls were made of three sheets of 50 x 34.5–35 cm, and thus represent a model of 150 x 35 cm, or a ratio of 4.5:1. The laid lines in these documents are always horizontal. An complete unillustrated roll from 617 or 618 A.H. agrees with this description,20 thus confirming our reconstructions and demonstrating that the new dimensions of both paper and document were applied also to certificates without long illustrated surfaces. A new design, with spacious settings of the text, large lines of calligraphy, and abundant illuminations was introduced to respond to the artistic requirements of the longer roll.

4. Not even one complete, or even fairly complete specimen of the fourth subdivision has survived, as a result of its excessive size. But thanks to six fragments of six identical rolls (stamped from the same set of blocks) a model of this group can be reconstructed.21 This model, composed of three 70 x 50 cm sheets, measures about 210 x 50 cm; the laid lines are vertical. The occurrence of joins in unexpected places, such as the bottom of Mt. Arafat, or the unusual size of certain illustrations, suggests the possibility of rolls even longer than 210 cm. As in the case of the third subdivision, some unillustrated rolls of the same description show that an artistic factor, the ratio of 4.2–4.3:1, became more important than the requirements of the content.22

The dimensions and the direction of the laid lines in the four groups show how they were made from the standard size of a paper sheet. The largest rolls were done as a chain of 70 x 50 cm sheets, the shorter sides joined and their longer sides making up the length of the roll (1). If such sheets are cut across into two parts of 35 x 50 cm each, and three such units are again linked by the shorter edges, they make up the medium size roll (4). Cutting the sheet across into three parts of 23.5 x 50 cm, instead of two, produces the smallest size roll (3), while cutting it lengthwise into two strips of 70 x 25 cm gives the second smallest model (2). The medium and large size rolls were in vogue throughout the Ayyubid period.23 The two small size groups, with inconsistent ratios of length and width, are fewer in number, and seem to represent a transitory stage of experimentation. The distorted ratio of certificate no. 4742, apparently unsuited to the given size of the illustrative programme, produced empty spaces. These were filled with large calligraphy in gold, which incidentally caused an unnatural separation between the zone of Bab Ibrahim and the rest of the Meccan mosque. The same phenomenon,

---

18 Inv. no. 4742, 4744, 4737, and 4746, respectively. The last two fragments in fact belong to one, almost complete, roll.
19 Inv. no. 531 (from 604 A.H.), 53/1, 53/3, 53/4, 53/10, 4902 (the stamping of which is identical with that from 620 A.H., which however belongs to the next group), 4739, 4743, 4745 (from 601 A.H.), 4747, and 4748 (which is identical with 4733).
20 Inv. no. 4106.
21 The fragments belonging to this subdivision are: inv. no. 53/3 (from 637 or 639 A.H.), 53/10, 53/13, 53/20, 53/24, 53/26 (all these are from identical scrolls, hence from ca. 637 A.H.), 53/17, 53/21, 53/27 (from 620 A.H.), 4118, 4738, and 4741 (from 617 A.H.).
22 Inv. no. 4766 (from 609 A.H.), and 4903.
23 The width within the frame-ruling of the earliest dated fragment with illustrations, no. 53/3, is slightly over 35cm. In another early document, inv. no. 53/1 from 604 A.H., the width within the frame is 35cm.
Plate 5: A fragment of an unillustrated roll, from ca. 610-15 A.H. (TfE, inv. no. 4094)

Plate 6: Fragments of three identical rolls from 637/1239–40 or 639/1241–42. (TfE, inv. no. 53/10, 53/20, 53/26)
in the same location, is seen in a fragment of a very large document, which may attest to an unsuccessful endeavour to produce a roll over 210 cm in length.

A certain change in the size of the paper sheets is appears towards the end of the Ayyubid period. The sheet of a new size used for the fragment with the banners of the last Ayyubid caliph was not large enough to produce the desired width of the roll, and was therefore joined to another small strip of paper. A join along the first decorative medallion on the right, the letter *ṣin* of the *bismillāh*, the banner, and the hanging lamp, shows the seam line between a 37 cm sheet on the left, and a 9 cm sheet on the right.

This new measurement of 37 cm becomes common in the Mamluk period, and seems to reflect a mould-frame of 54 x 37–38 cm or, conversely, a frame of 75 x 54 cm. In either case, the laid lines are parallel to the 54 cm edge. This sheet was cut into two in either sense, and the pieces were joined into rolls by the shorter side. Thus we have examples of 37–38 cm wide rolls with joints every 50–52 cm and vertical laid lines, and examples of 27 cm wide rolls with joints every 37–38 cm, and horizontal laid lines. Some of these documents contain reduced illustrations of the holy places in the spaces between the exaggeratedly long lines of the vertical letters, and others are unillustrated. There is no visible difference in the compositional design of the two categories, as the isolated images of the monuments do not make a coherent and continuous cycle with binding proportions. There is no longer a required ratio, and the roll can be composed of any number of sheets. Thus we could not evaluate the original combination of some of the Mamluk fragments.

**Block Printing**

A growing demand for illustrated certificates and the prestige that luxurious art works confer upon their patrons may be the reason for the introduction of an important innovation—the technique of wood and metal block printing, and most probably also metal blocks. From 607 A.H., the date of our earliest dated specimen, the number of documents with stamped illustrations expanded continuously alongside the hand-painted ones. By the second quarter of the thirteenth century, it

---

24 Inv. no. 4728 (from 674 A.H.), 4725 (from 689 A.H.), and 4735.

25 For example, the identical rolls: no. 4731 and 4727 (from 691 or 692 A.H.), no. 4726 (from 704 A.H.), and no. 4726.

26 Inv. no. 53119.
seems, only printed documents were produced, but this trend came to an end in the early years of the Mamluk period, when stamping dwindled in quality as well as in quantity, until it disappeared all together.

The technique was applied in all the components of the design: the calligraphic *bismillah* and a few other large inscriptions, a decorative frame around three sides of the document (excluding the foot), the illustrations, sometimes with identifying labels, the decorative panels between lines of text, and, occasionally, isolated motifs. In iconography and in style the stamped and the hand painted illustrations faithfully follow the same pattern, but the pictorial details stamped by the blocks are normally of higher quality, the division of the pictorial space is more precise, the symmetry is more exact, and the overall design has a more orderly appearance.

Engraved blocks were used to produce both lines and surfaces. The lines served mainly as frames or contours around pictorial units, which were painted by hand after the stamping. The contours were usually conceived as two parallel lines, which either frame the painted units, or separate between coloured fields, or even outline black surfaces—letters, banners and walls. In the first case the space between the two lines is often painted in orange, red-brick or light brown, to produce a coloured framing band, 1 or 2 mm wide. Line stamping is used also for some pronouncedly linear details such as surface decoration (see the decorative pattern on the wall of *al-mash’ar al-bar‘am*) and the small captions inside the illustrations (on the same plate). To stamp lines, the block engraver cut the surface of the block all around the line, so that the ink or paint cover only the lines, and do not touch the sunken background.

On the other hand, in printing surfaces the motif itself is cut out of the face of the block, and thus remains uncoloured in the process of stamping. The protruding parts of the engraved block produce a coloured background around the neutral motif, and the result is a coloured negative image. This technique, in our certificates, was used for depicting the white inscriptions on the black banners of ‘Arafat, a white inscription on the black *kiswa* of the Ka‘ba, and the flowers, inscriptions, and interlacings in all the decorative borders. In some instances, the motifs in negative are coloured, either by hand, or by a second block, as in the long tradition of the textile industry.

Plate 6

Plate 7: Fragment of a large roll from the time of al-Musta‘sim bi-dīn Allah (1242–58 A.H.). (TIEM, inv. no. 4724)

Plates 6, 8

---

27 In the border of fragment no. 53/27 the very complex white interlace was stamped in white over the negative pattern inside the light-blue background. An identical coloured background was stamped in fragment no. 4709, but without a second stamping in white.
A surprising phenomenon is the discrepancy between the very high quality of the engraving and the rather coarse hand painted filling. This discrepancy seems to reflect a division of work between the accomplished master engraver, the experienced printer, and the rapidly working painter, each of whom may have worked in another workshop. If the various stages of production were carried out in the same town is so far an open question.

The technique of stamping in lines or colours on flat surfaces, known in the Near East from the earliest Mesopotamian civilizations, was at first restricted to seals of various kinds, and wood blocks for decorating textiles. Coloured printing on textiles was greatly developed in India, while in China it was used on paper. Buddhist images were made in Dunhuang already in the seventh century, and colour printing of calenders, pictorial depictions of shrines and materials for exorcism became popular and were disseminated on a large scale among all social strata already in the ninth century. In the tenth and eleventh centuries large editions of pagoda prints were made for national distribution.

In the domain of pious and exorcist printed matter, the earliest known stamped papers are talismanic rolls from the tenth century and through the Fatimid period. Two examples of this category, with elaborate kufic script and interlaced prophylactic motifs at the head, are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A few others from Austrian and German collections have been published, and still more can be found in various collections. The small rolls were first folded and then rolled up, to be carried in a little case; the larger may have been kept in the house as protection. These amulets are printed in black ink on white paper or vellum, occasionally with ornamental (or rather magic) motifs interspersed between the sections of writing. A large, yet unpublished collection of printed talismanic rolls is part of the Damascus treasure, now in Istanbul, and a good deal of it seems to be contemporary with the illustrated Hajj certificates.

In that period printing on cotton became a popular industry around the Mediterranean, and in literary sources we read also about printing used for official paper documents. A paragraph by Ibn ‘Atir says that the emir ‘Abd Allîh wrote his documents (or protocols) at his home, and sent them to the printer. The printed documents were brought back to him to be signed by hand, and were then sent to the addresses. In another biographical treatise an author is said to have written a book on the properties and fabrication of ink and printing instruments. A fourteenth century wooden seal from the qaysariyya of Almariyya confirms the use of such stamps in the commercial administration.

We do not know much about the origins of printing documents in Islamic countries, at a period when this technique was as yet unknown in the Christian world. It may have come from China, it may represent an autonomous development in the Islamic Mediterranean countries, or it may be a mixture of the two. The TIEM documents, especially the talismanic rolls, perhaps suggest the Chinese connection, as in a case of stamping in black and red alternatively, which calls to mind the red seals on Chinese black prints. In another case, the strangely undulating letters of the hicomilâh at the head very much resemble characters of Chinese seals. The talismanic rolls are a combination of various sections of often nonsensical texts, written in small letters, large inscriptions of Qur’anic verses, magic squares, symbolic figures, and illustrations of the holy places. Each of these categories is stamped from a separate block.

---

32 Twelfth- or thirteenth-century fragments of Spanish silk tunics with printed motifs are reproduced in Cyril G.E. Bunt, Hispano-Moresque Fabrics (Leigh-on-Sea, F. Lewis Publishers, 1966), pls. 11–12. A pseudo-inscription in a floral kufic style is close to some of the TIEM printed papers.


34 Ibid., pp. 252–54.


and occasional borders of large or small inscriptions are made by repeated stamping from one block. The individual square or rectangular stamps of these small rolls vary from 3 to 24 cm a side. The illustrations of the holy places measure, for example, 14 x 23 cm in the case of 'Arafāṭ, 37 14 x 15.5 cm for the Kaʿba, 38 12.5 x 10.3 cm or 14 x 15.5 cm for Medina. 39

On the big Haji rolls, on the other hand, the largest illustrations can attain a size of 50 cm and more. Therefore the size of blocks and the divisions of the surface are different, and related to the size of the roll. A certain pattern of such a relationship can be distinguished, in spite of the difficulty of tracing the borders of the individual blocks on the fragmentary and damaged documents. Unrelated to the specific roll is a decorative border, made by repetitive stamping from a block which was used for rolls of various sizes. The border units vary from 10.5 cm to 18 cm in length, and from 2.2 cm to 4.5 cm in width. As they are not adapted to the individual roll, in one instance the border may be shorter than the cycle of illustrations, and in another longer. This may be the reason for the absence of a decorative border along the lower part of the certificates. Identical borders, as much as identical illustrations, allow us to attribute a date to non-dated fragments.

The relationship between the size of the roll and the block can be summarized as follows:

The cycle of illustrations in the small and medium size rolls (excluding the earliest dated one) were stamped from six blocks, two narrow ones for the bismillah and Jerusalem, and four larger ones, almost equal in length, for the following sections: 1. Mt. 'Arafāṭ without the plain at its foot. 2. From the plain of 'Arafāṭ to Bāb Ibrāhīm. 3. The enclosure of the Kaʿba. 4. The mas'ād and the Prophet's mosque in Medina. These blocks measure from 21 to 30 cm in length, and 15 to 30 cm in width. A square block of some 30 cm a side seems to have been considered a convenient size. 40

In the group of large rolls, a similar division of the surface would have produced sections too big to be workable. Even some single illustrations are too big to be handled comfortably. A solution to this

37 Inv. no. 44/23.
38 Inv. no. 44/26.
39 Inv. no. 42/14 and 43/23 respectively.
40 For example, inv. no. 4748. The other rolls of this category are inv. no. 4744, with a block of 23.5 x 22 cm; 4742, with a block of 23.5 x 15 cm; 4092, with a block of 21.5 x 15 cm. The last two belong to the group of small size rolls.
difficulty may be seen in some of the more accomplished fragments. The smaller illustrations in the cycle were stamped by single blocks, and the larger ones were split into two or more parts. For example, in the six identical rolls that can be reconstructed from six fragments, the horizontal sides of all the blocks measure 38 cm (the width of the illustrated surface within the border), and the vertical sides would be as follows: The *bismillah*: 20 cm, the plain of ‘Arafat: 7 cm, Muzdalifah: 11 cm, the lower part of Medina: 25 cm, Jerusalem: 16 cm. The illustration of Minā, although equal in size to that of Jerusalem, in divided into two blocks, and this may suggest a similar subdivision in other illustrations of the same group. We tried to find this subdivision but without success.

However, extant fragments of Mt. ‘Arafat from other large certificates show a growing tendency to assemble compositions from a number of blocks, along both horizontal and vertical cuts. In one case, for example, the banners seem to be divided along vertical lines, their posts along a horizontal line, and the mountain was certainly cut into two horizontal layers. Perhaps at certain points unaccomplished engravers or printers met with difficulties in planning and assembling this puzzle, and resorted to stamping only parts of the composition, drawing the other parts in free hand. This is the case in a certificate from the reign of al-Imām al-Musta’sim, hence no earlier than 640 A.H. Here the banners are printed, but the posts are drawn, the *qubba* and the mountain are printed, but the candles and two hanging lamps are drawn by hand. In addition, the illustration has no binding frame.

A more advanced step in this direction is found in a very large illustration of Mecca (about 52 cm high, inv. no. 53/25), where the arcaded enclosure walls, the tall standing torches, and perhaps even the contours of the Ka’ba are drawn, together with faint grid lines. Over this grid, the printer used small blocks to stamp various monuments inside the court, and the white inscription on the *kiswa*.

In the Mamluk period these full, detailed and coherent compositions gradually disappeared, yielding to occasional reduced images stamped between the long vertical letters of the large inscriptions. The isolated monuments were treated in the same way as the floral motifs and medallions. The cycle of illustrations disintegrated, and the designer of the roll did not follow a given ratio or a coherent surface scheme. The Mamluk certificates are assembled from a non-specific number of sheets, and each sheet is executed separately. Only after the stage of writing, drawing, stamping, and painting the isolated motifs, were the single...
sheets joined, and the joins always cover the ends of the vertical letters, which approach the end of the sheet.

Were all the rolls made in one place? Were all the stages in their preparation carried out in one place? What do the rolls tell us about the history of arts and crafts in their days? These questions remain open, until further research, and perhaps further finds, will yield additional data. For the present, we can sum up our description as follows:

We saw that the introduction and eventual disappearance of a continuous block of illustrations on the certificates necessarily influenced the overall design of the roll. A new ratio, imposed by the extent of the illustrations, led to a different pattern of cutting the paper, and probably also the use of a coarser paper, suitable for display in vertical hanging. The gradual deterioration of the printing technique coincides with the disintegration of the illustrations, and with a change in constructing the roll. It is evident that first the introduction and then the eventual disappearance of a continuous cycle of illustrations influenced the overall design, and may reflect a change in the function of the certificates. We may suppose that these changes are noticeable also in the text, the iconography and the calligraphic styles. Only a study of these aspects, and an investigation into the sources of artistic influence can provide an explanation of the phenomenon of the sumptuous Haji rolls. We hope that our notes on the material aspects will be useful in future research on this important collection.

Le Plus Grand Coran du Monde et Baysoungour

Ali Alpaslan

L’importance que la religion Islamique a prêtée à la lecture et à l’écriture du Coran a eu un impact particulier sur le développement et sur l’embellissement de la belle écriture (la calligraphie) des lettres Arabes. Le désir d’écriture bien les paroles de Dieu avait commencé dès l’époque des quatre califes. Les fruits de ce désir sont apparus déjà à cette époque là. Plusieurs copies du Coran qui n’ont pas vus le jour auparavant et prétendues d’être écrites à l’époque sus-mentionnée, embellissant aujourd’hui les bibliothèques du Monde, ont une importance spéciale du point de vue du développement de cette écriture.