During the sixteenth century one of the most important schools of painting and book production flourished at Shiraz in Iran under the patronage of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (1524–76) and others. The exquisite paintings often illustrated Persian poetry. This painting features a convey of pilgrims on route to Mecca; some pilgrims ride camels or horses, others are on foot. The wealthier pilgrims are carried in elaborate palanquins. They are observed by onlookers who peek out from behind the hills. The painting illustrates a story from the Gulistan or 'Rose Garden' of the celebrated sage and poet Sadi al-Shirazi (d. 1722), who undoubtedly wrote himself on Hajj. It comes from chapter 7, 'On the effects of education':

"One year a dispute broke out amongst the hajjis who were travelling on foot, and I too was going on foot. We ‘dispersed justice’ fully indulging our viciousness and quarrelsomeness, by means of an angry shouting match. I heard someone who was sitting in a camel litter say to the man next to him: ‘How strange! If a pawn travels the length of the chessboard it becomes a queen, and so becomes better; but those travellers to Hajj on foot have crossed the desert – and become worse’.

"...left the besetting pilgrim on my behalf – him who injures people by slanderous tales – you’re no pilgrim! four camels is the real one: poor creature, he eats them and carries back..." (translated by Muhammad Iza Waley)
Fig. 9
The Maqamat (Assemblies)
of al-Hariri (fol. 99a)

Baghdad, 1237
Opaque watercolour,
ink and gold on paper
19 x 34 cm
Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Paris

The Maqamat, meaning 'assemblies', are a genre of Arabic
literature in rhymed prose. They centre around a narrator, the
merchant al-Hariri, and a roguish figure called Abu Zayd. Here, in the
thirty-first Maqama, al-Hariri joins a Hajj-bound caravan. At one of the
stops he hears the voice of Abu Zayd, eloquently haranguing the pilgrims.
Abu Zayd is depicted here standing
on a balcony, with the pilgrims
gathered around him.

‘Oh you company of pilgrims …
do you comprehend what you are
about to face … and what you
are undertaking so boldly? Do you
imagine that the Hajj is the choosing
of sable beasts, the traversing of
stations? … that pieté is the tacking
up of sleeves, the embrocating
of bodies, the separation of children,
the getting far from your native
place? No by Allah … it is the
sincerely al piousse for making for
that building there, and the purity of
submission along with the fervour of
devotion, the mending of deals,
before working the doughy comets.’
(Translated by A. Shafi)
This map is one of the great masterpieces of the medieval world. It is a nautical chart combined with historical, ethnographic, botanical and zoological information in the form of colourful illustrations and texts. It is a part of a tradition of medieval world maps known as mappae mundi and is attributed to the Majorcan magnate Abraham Cresques. Such maps were made as gifts for great monarchs and this example may have been presented to Charles V of France in about 1320.

The detail illustrated is from a section on Africa. It shows the King of Mali, Mansa Musa, seated on his throne holding a staff and a golden globe. Mansa Musa famously went on hajj in 1324. He left from his capital Timbuktu, a great medieval city of learning, and journeyed in great style across the desert to Mecca. He is said to have travelled on herdonk preceded by 100 slaves, each carrying a staff of gold, and with a retinue of 60,000 servants. He carried with him so much gold and such was his generosity that he is said to have flooded the market with corn, causing the Egyptian economy to labor for about ten years.
Ceremonial delivery of the Imperial Surra to the Captain of the Procession

Ignace de Mouradjea d’Ornai economical
Tableau Général de l’Empire Ottoman, Paris, 1787 (pl. 46)
51 x 34 cm
Arcadian Library, London

In 1317 the Ottomans, with their capital at Istanbul, took over Egypt and Syria from the Mamluks, who had long enjoyed levity of the Hijaz and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Ottomans took their Hajj responsibilities extremely seriously. Every year they organized the great caravans to Mecca known as the Surra (purse). This engraving shows one of the ceremonies that took place with great pomp at Topkapi Palace before departure.

The Sultan is seated on his throne in the pavilion and the peresman stands before him. On the left the chief stablesman holds the bridle of the camel bearing the ceremonial palanquin known as the mukal. The Ottoman sultan never went on Hajj for security reasons, but the mukul symbolized his authority in a tradition going back to the Mamluk sultan Baybars (1260–77). A second reserve camel can be seen on the right. These camels were simply part of the ceremonial and did not actually go to Mecca. A group of official figures on the right carry the documents that are to be delivered to the Surra captain, the leader of the Hajj caravans.

The Tableau Général was a remarkable endeavour. It was a two-volume compendium of the history and customs of the Ottomans written by Ignace de Mouradjea d’Ornai, an Armenian banker living in Istanbul, and richly illustrated with engravings based on the works by a large number of artists from both within and outside the Ottoman empire.
Fig. 12
Costumes Turks (vol. i, fol. 125)

Ottoman Turkey, c.1790
Watercolour on paper
22 x 37 cm
British Museum, London

Money was carried with the Sûrê caravan to Mecca to pay for services along the route and gifts to the holy sanctuaries and the people of Mecca. These would include Qur’ans, gold coins and objects such as candlessticks. This watercolour is from an album of drawings formerly in the collection of Heinrich Friedrich von Diez. It shows a white mule draped with bells and bearing gifts. The structure on its back echoes the form of the malmal and is decorated with plummed sticks. This drawing also appears in the form of an engraving in d’Ohsson’s Tableau Général de l’Empire Ottoman (see Fig. 11).
Fig. 31
The Amir al-Hajj (caravan commander), Abul Fowha, on his way from Mecca to Medina,
from Anis al-Hijaz (The Pilgrim’s Companion) by Salī ibn Yābūl (fol. 18b)
India, possibly Gujarāt, c.1677-80
Opaque watercolour, ink
and gold on paper
33 x 23.2 cm
Nasser D. Khalili Collection
of Islamic Art

This painting is one of a number of illustrations (see figs 14 and 35) from a pilgrims’ manual
written during the year-long (Hajj)
undertaken by its author Salī ibn Yābūl in 1676. Besides giving advice about the journey by ship
and the rituals of Hajj, it describes the
groups of pilgrims he saw on route
coming from different parts of the
world. Some of the paintings have
annotations, as in this example,
where we see Abul Fowha, the Amir
al-Hajj, dressed in gold on a horse
identified in an inscription above. He
was in charge of the Hajj caravan
of that year from Egypt, which here
is depicted on its way to Medina.
He is escorting the malik, the
sacred palanquin that represented
the authority of the Ottoman sultan,
carried by the camel at the top of the
painting. There is also a Qur’ān on
a stand, one of a number of gifts for
the sanctuary. The convoy is escorted
by soldiers armed with rifles as the
caravans were often attacked and
plundered. The artist is unknown
but the style is typically Mughal;
particularly in the features and dress
of the people.
Fig. 14
Crossing the Sea of Oman,
from An-Nasr al-Mubtada’ (The Pilgrim’s
Companion) by Safi ibn Valli
(fol. 3b)
India, possibly Gujarat,
c.1677-80
Opaque watercolour, ink
and gold on paper
33 x 23.2 cm
Nasser D. Khalili Collection
of Islamic Art

In this painting the ships having
traversed the Indian Ocean are
now crossing the Arabian Sea (here
called the Sea of Oman) on their
way to the Red Sea and up to Jeddah.
Safi ibn Valli advises pilgrims to be
careful in their choice of ships and
to make sure that the captain does
not take on too many passengers.
They are traveling in ocean-going
dhowes in convoy. The smaller
boats are perhaps there to guide them. In
this lively and engaging composition
they are close to the shore and the
boats face in different directions,
the sailors busy on deck with the
sails. Fish leap out of the water and
a sea turtle is paddling on the right.
During the Mäqchil period every year
some 75,000 pilgrims went to Mecca
or Hajj.

Fig. 15
Chart of the Red Sea
and Gulf of Aden (detail)
Gujarat, c.1833
Opaque watercolour and ink
on paper
24.1 x 19.6 cm
Royal Geographical Society, London

This chart drawn up by a Gujarati pilot
or sea captain accurately represents
the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.
As in the painting from the An-Nasr
al-Mubtada’ (opposite), the coast is shown
as a series of curves. Key places that
would have been of interest to sailors
including islands and reefs, as well as
flags of local rulers are annotated in
Gujarati and Hindi, with some places
noted in English such as Khamares
Island. Different types of ships with
colourful red and yellow sails are
shown sailing along marked directional
lines. It is likely that this map was used
by ships transporting pilgrims to Mecca
or Hajj. Depending on the season, the
Red Sea could be notoriously difficult to
navigate and ships had sometimes to
be wrecked by local rather than ocean-
going vessels.

This map was presented to Sir
Alexander Burnes, a distinguished
Dutch and scholar who served in
the Government of India, by a pilot in
Kutch in western India where Burnes
had been appointed assistant to the
political agent in 1829.
Mecca: The Blessed City

'I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation by Your Sacred House'
Qur'an 14:17

Mecca, where the Prophet Muhammad was born in AD 570, is situated in present-day Saudi Arabia, within a barren landscape in the mountainous region known as the Hijaz. It owes its existence to a sacred shrine that developed around the well of Zamzam. For centuries before the coming of Islam, the well, the Ka’ba and the surrounding Haram or sanctuary were controlled by a succession of nomadic tribes. The site became the main focus of pilgrimage for people across Arabia, and violence was prohibited there. Mecca also became an important centre of trade on the route between southern Arabia and the Mediterranean. With the coming of Islam, the Haram became firmly rooted as the focus of the new religion and the direction towards which Muslims prayed.

Today the sanctuary covers an approximate area of 400,000 square metres and can accommodate up to one million people. At the centre is the Ka’ba, with the Black Stone built into the south-eastern corner. Around the Ka’ba are a number of other sites of religious significance, including the Maqam Ibrahim and the well of Zamzam. Depictions of the Haram take a number of different forms, but the most popular is a two-dimensional diagram found on tiles and Hajj certificates, with labels in Arabic script identifying key places. Other illustrations combine the plan with a bird’s-eye view showing architectural detail.
Fig. 37
Bird's-eye view of Mecca
Vienna, 1803
Engraving by Carl Pontoheimer
49.7 x 88.3 cm
British Museum, London

This panorama of Mecca was drawn by the Austrian orientalist Andreas Magnuus Hungenberger, who accompanied Constantin Ludovit, minister of the King of the Two Sicilies, to Mecca. He based the panorama on an illustration in Mauvignier d'Hostun's Tableau Chretien de l'Empire Ottoman (see fig. 11). The same Shawsh pilgrims wending their way in a long caravan across the desert and pouring into the sanctuary in their thousands. Designed to be informative, it contains a key to sixty numbered locations in and around the sanctuary. Neither d'Hostun nor his engravers actually went to Mecca but would have based the description and drawing on existing illustrations and the accounts of Ottoman pilgrims.
Panoramic view of Mecca (detail) by Muhammad Abdallah, c.1845

Opaque watercolour and ink on paper
62.8 x 88 cm
Nasir D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art

This view of Mecca was commissioned by the Shah of Mecca (Muhammad bin abd al-Mu'min (1827–35)). The cartographer Muhammad Abdallah is described in the inscription as "cartographer of the city", and his grandfather Mazar Ali Khan was court painter to the Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah II (1837–48). This panorama combines a detailed plan of the city with a bird's-eye view of about forty degrees. Muhammad Abdallah must have resided in Mecca. Richard Burton, who visited the holy cities in disguise in 1833, remarked that "some Indians support themselves by depicting the holy shrines, their works are a truly Oriental mixture of ground plan and elevation, drawn with pen and ink, and brightened with the most vivid colours ..."