

Windows on the House of Islam

*Muslim Sources on Spirituality
and Religious Life*

Edited by

JOHN RENARD

1998

University of California Press

BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON



Hamka

Qur'an Commentary on Pilgrimage Ritual

ANTHONY H. JOHNS

Pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth of the "pillars" of Islam. As numerous visual reminders make clear (see figs. 16 and 17),⁷ over the centuries Muslims have expended enormous effort preparing for the event and enjoyed reminiscing about it afterward. The following example of modern *tafsir* from Indonesia discusses an important ritual aspect of the required religious practice of hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca. During hajj, pilgrims commemorate Hagar's frantic search for water for her baby Isma'il; this commentary explains a key verse related to the practice, 2:158.

Hamka is the acronym of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908–81). His father, Karim Amrullah, belonged to the first generation of Sumatran 'ulama' who returned from study in the Middle East at the turn of the nineteenth century to spread the reformist ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida in the then Dutch East Indies. Hamka was born in 1908, in central Sumatra. He studied with his father (of whom he wrote a biography), with other outstanding local 'ulama', and at local religious schools. He first made the pilgrimage in 1927 (he was to make it seven times). He became a leading figure in the Reformist Muhammadiyah (a social welfare and educational organization), and in addition became widely known as a novelist. After the Japanese occupation he became a national figure, and from 1959 on regularly denounced Sukarno's increasing reliance on the Indonesian Communist Party. He was arrested in 1964 and held in detention until 1966, being rehabilitated in 1967. While in prison he wrote the *tafsir* from which this excerpt comes. When the Council of Indonesian 'ulama' was established in 1975, he was elected its first general chairman.⁸

"Safa and Marwa [two hills now within the precincts of the Ka'ba] too are among the signs of God. So whoever makes the Hajj or the 'Umra [lesser pilgrimage] to the House, there is no objection that he makes the round between them. Whoever adds to a good deed, then God is indeed one who responds to gratitude, one who is all-knowing" [Q 2:158].

According to Muhammad 'Abduh in the explanation he gives in his *tafsir*, this verse continues the matters presented in the verses on the change of *kiblat* [i.e., qibla, facing Mecca] [2:144–145: "Turn your face then toward the Sacred Mosque . . ."], although other *tafsir* do not make

this connection. It mentions the hastening to and fro (*sa'y*) between Safa and Marwa after giving a reminder of the need for prayer and patience [2:153: "ask help with prayer and patience"] and the endurance of trials of various kinds later to receive the fullness of God's blessing [2:157: "It is such who receive blessings and mercy from their Lord"].

This verse then gives hope that a time will come when they will be able to make the round between Safa and Marwa. No matter how hard are present difficulties they now face, there must always be hope, especially when it is God Himself who gives this hope.

"Safa and Marwa too are among the signs of God" [2:158, first words]. We have enriched our Indonesian language with the word *shi'ar*, for we regularly speak of the *syi'ar* of Islam. *Shi'ar* means sign. Its plural form is *sha'a'ir*. *Sha'a'iru'llah* means signs of devotion to God. Many such signs are included in the performance of the Hajj. The napes of the necks of the camels and cattle to be sacrificed on the conclusion of the Hajj are incised as a sign. This incision is called a *shi'ar*. Prayer at the tomb of Abraham is another of these *sha'a'ir* of devotion. Circumambulation of the Ka'ba, the station at 'Arafat, and also the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa mentioned in this verse are also among these *sha'a'ir*, and likewise the stoning of Jumra [pillars representing the Devil] at Mina.

These rituals are classed as acts of devotion (*ta'abbud*), as opposed to acts of understanding (*ta'aqul*). *Ta'abbud* means an act of religious devotion, but why it is performed as it is is not accessible to reason.

Ta'aqul is an act of understanding. We can understand by the use of reason why we perform the ritual prayer, but we cannot understand why for the midday (*zuhr*) prayer there should be four cycles of prostration (*rak'a*) and for the dawn (*subh*) prayer two cycles. These are acts of devotion. We can understand why the Hajj should be performed at least once in a lifetime. This is an act of understanding. But we cannot understand why there should be a command to stone Jumra with small stones seven times. This is an act of devotion. All such *sha'a'ir* are acts of devotion.

"So whoever makes the Hajj or 'Umra to the House, there is no objection that he makes the round between them." The House referred to here is the *bayt Allah* (the House of God, the Ka'ba). Now the Hajj is

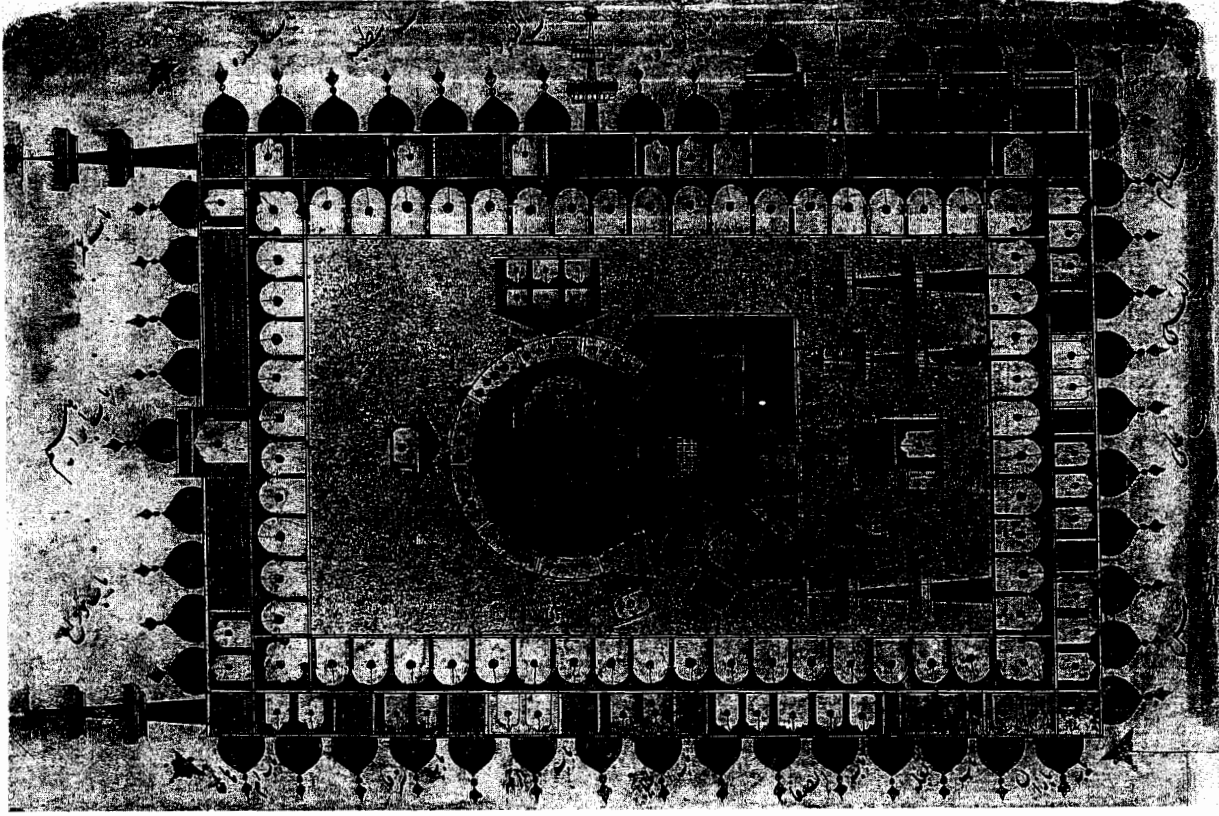


Figure 16. A leaf from a Pilgrimage guidebook shows the Ka'ba in both plan and elevation and indicates the various sacred sites within the sanctuary, especially the "station of Abraham," where the prophet is said to have stood and prayed, and the well of Zamzam at lower left of the Ka'ba. Written in Mecca in 1582 after the Ottoman conquest of the central Middle East, the diagram also indicates places assigned to the four Sunni law schools and the names of all gates into the sanctuary. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, The Edwin Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art, 1985:265A. (See also fig. 22.)

performed on a prescribed date, commencing on the ninth [sic] of the month Dhu 'l-Hijja (the twelfth lunar month) and continuing until the completion of the halt at Mina, on the twelfth or thirteenth of Dhu 'l-Hijja. The 'Umra, on the other hand, is an obligation that may be fulfilled any time, including during the Hajj season. It does not involve the station at 'Arafat and the halting at Muzdalifah and Mina. Both the Hajj and the 'Umra, however, require putting on the garment of *iḥram* and the circumambulation of the Ka'ba, and both require the hastening to and fro (*sa'y*) between the hills of Safa and Marwa.

Safa and Marwa are two small hills not far from the Sacred Mosque. The distance between them is about 760.5 cubits [circa 200 m]. After the most recent renovations to the Masjid al-Haram (1957), both are within the mosque precinct. The *sa'y*, that is, the going to and fro around these two hills seven times, is part of both the Hajj and the 'Umra. It is performed after completion of the circumambulation. After this, divestiture [*tahallul*], that is, the cutting of the hair and taking off of the garment of *iḥram*, is permissible. With this divestiture the ceremonies of the pilgrimage are complete.

According to a hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, this *shī'ar* of hastening to and fro commemorates Hajar (the second wife of Abraham). After she had given birth to Isma'il, Abraham left her alone in the desert because he had to continue his journey to Syria. Their supply of water was finished, her breasts were almost dry, and there was no well in that place. Her child Isma'il had been crying with hunger until his throat was hoarse. Full of anxiety, Hajar hastened to and fro seven times between the two hills looking for water, while her child remained alone, in her tent in the lower valley.

Suddenly she heard a voice, and saw a bird flying. At the same time, she could hear the voice of her child crying for milk. After her hastening to and fro seven times, she ran back to where she had left her child. There she saw an angel digging the earth at its feet, and water appeared. Anxiously she scooped up the water in her hands exclaiming, "Zam! Zam!" which means, "Gather round! Gather round!"

By chance at the same time, a caravan of the people of Jurhum passed by looking for water. This became the well of Zamzam, and this was how

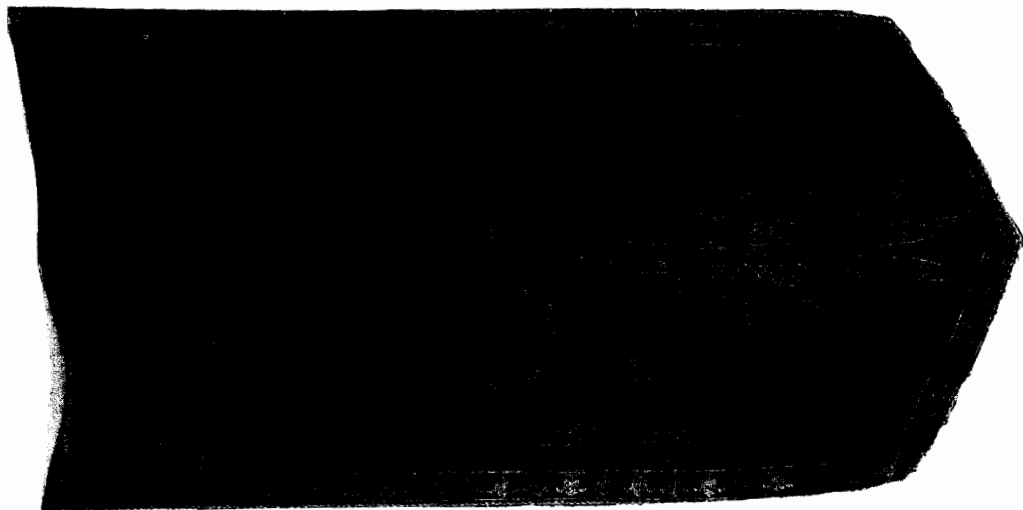


Figure 17. Above a field of talismanic geometric shapes (stars, circles, octagons) on this North African pilgrims' banner (1683), a large horizontal band of Kufic script quotes Q 48:1-3: "Truly we have granted you [Muhammad] a decisive victory victorious, [namely] that God might forgive your sins [both] past and future, bring his grace to fulfillment in you, and guide you on a straight path; and that God might assist you with redoubtable aid." The twin blades of 'Ali's sword, Dhu 'l-Faqr, repeat those verses in the more flowing Naskhi script, adding part of verse 4: "He it is who sent down peace upon the hearts of the believers. . . ." In the rectangular panel directly below the upper inscription, an Arabic poem in Maghribi script mentions several of the rituals and sites integral to the hajj, as well as the name 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), suggesting that members of the Qadiriya *tariqa* carried the banner. Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Gift of John Goelet, 1958.20.

"the barren valley" [Q 14:37: "Our Lord, I have set some of my posterity to dwell in a barren valley next to your Sacred House"] became populated and developed into a city. This was the origin of Mecca.

So Hajar's hastening to and fro became one of the *shi'ar* of the Hajj and the 'Umra, and the verse that we are explaining acknowledges her as indeed a *shi'ar* of devotion to God. A special sign of religious devotion.

Why should there be or not be anything wrong if one wishes to hasten to and fro between these two hills as is required?

According to a hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim, 'Urwa ibn Zubayr one day expressed to 'A'isha,* Mother of the Believers, his opinion that from the wording of the verse the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa is not obligatory, for if it said there is no objection if one hastens to and fro between these two hills, then there is certainly no objection if one does not do so. 'Urwa's opinion was aptly answered by 'A'isha, "It is not as you understand it, my sister's son."

[The hadith continues:] "The hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa is one of the *sha'a'ir* of devotion. The reason why the verse says there is no objection to the practice is that, during the Time of Ignorance,[†] if any of the Ansar[‡] went to Mecca to perform the Hajj or 'Umra, they were sure to encounter a huge, menacing statue of Manat[§] placed between the two hills. After they had become Muslims, they had doubts as to whether they should still perform the hastening to and fro between the two hills while the statue of Manat was still there. This verse makes it clear that there was no objection to their hastening to and fro even though the statue was still there." Such is a summary of the hadith in Bukhari and Muslim.

The verse continues, "Whoever adds to a good deed, then God is indeed one who responds to gratitude, who knows all things" [2:158, end]. Performance of the Hajj or 'Umra is required only once in a life-

* 'A'isha (d. 678): Muhammad's youngest wife and a transmitter of numerous traditions.

[†] Time of Ignorance: the age of *jahiliya*, prior to the advent of Islam.

[‡] The Ansar ("Helpers") were citizens of Medina who become Muslims after the hijra.

[§] Manat was one of the three pre-Islamic deities called "daughters of Allah." Muhammad forbade belief in them, of course.

time. However, if one wishes to repeat it, doing a good deed willingly [and not out of obligation—by *tatawwu'*] by adding another performance of the Hajj or the 'Umra, up to as many times as one goes to Mecca, God will respond to the pious act and reward the good deed. God knows every good deed one does.

So it seems that this verse is indeed connected with the command to change the direction of the kibat and the hope it gives for a future victory. At a time to come, Muhammad's followers in Medina will indeed be able to perform the 'Umra. Even though at the time of the revelation of this verse there was still an idol between the hills of Safa and Marwa, and there were still statues lining the walls of the Ka'ba, there was no objection to their continuing their act of devotion, because it had no connection with the idols.

Some time later, the Messenger of God dreamt that he and his companions would be able to go to Mecca to perform the 'Umra, and then they would go together. But when in year 6 of the Hijra they reached Hudaibiya, the Quraysh* prevented them from going further. The treaty of Hudaibiya[†] was made, and they did not go that year. It was not until the following year, year 7, that the 'Umra of Qadha took place. They were able to perform the 'Umra in full. They circumambulated the Ka'ba, although it still contained idols, and they did the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa, although there was still a statue of Manat there. They paid no attention to these idols. They carried out the *sha'a'ir* of the ceremony in full.

Then, a year later, in year 8, because the Quraysh had dishonored the treaty, the city of Mecca was conquered, and all the idols were swept away. Before they achieved this, the Muslims endured sufferings of many kinds, shortages of material possessions and loss of friends who died as martyrs on the field of battle in jihad, but at the end came the fullness of the blessings that God had promised. And God repaid with victory in this world and happiness in the hereafter all the efforts they had made and the good deeds they had done.

* The Quraysh were the ruling tribe in Mecca.

[†] In the treaty of Hudaibiya, a place ten miles from Mecca, the Quraysh agreed to allow the Muslims to visit the holy city.

Concerning this hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa, all the 'ulama' whose authority we accept agree that it is one of the rituals of the pilgrimage. They only differ concerning the way it is defined according to the norms of *fiqh* [religious law]. Malik, Shafi'i, and Ibn Hanbal are of the view that it is a component [*ruk'n*] of the Hajj. Abu Hanifa is of the view that its performance is obligatory for the Hajj.