The Ottomans | Guardians of the Holy Sites

‘The sultans were obliged to ensure that the faithful could carry out their religious duties, of which the pilgrimage is one.’

The holiest place of Islam, the Ka’ba in Mecca, is dedicated to the direction of the canonical prayers by the Prophet Muhammad. As the centre of the faith, the Ka’ba is also the final destination of the pilgrimage which every Muslim tries to make at least once in a lifetime, and the Ottoman sultans were obliged to ensure that the faithful could carry out their religious duties, of which the pilgrimage is one. The prestige of the sultanate, therefore, very much depended on the safety of the pilgrimage routes, which they guaranteed mainly by payments to the Bedouins, whose territories the caravans crossed en-route to Mecca. They also took measures to protect the resting places of the pilgrims in the desert by building forts. At the beginning of the 20th century modern technical achievements improved transportation to the region with the construction of the Hijaz railway.



Name:
Seal of the Dome of the Rock

Dynasty:
Hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman

Details:
Islamic Museum, al-Aqsa Mosque / al-Haram al-Sharif
Jerusalem

Justification:
Depictions of the holy sites, each identified with a caption, were produced for the pilgrims either as an entrance token, a blessing or as a souvenir of their visit.



Name:
Printing block (stamp) listing holy places in the region of Palestine

Dynasty:
Hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman

Details:
Islamic Museum, al-Aqsa Mosque / al-Haram al-Sharif
Jerusalem

Justification:
The block holds engraved Ottoman-Turkish inscriptions that name the principal holy sites in Palestine.



Name:
Tomb cover

Dynasty:
Hegira 11th century / AD 17th century Ottoman

Details:
National Museums of Scotland (NMS)
Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:
Kiswa-like tomb covers recall the importance of the Ka'ba for the faithful.



Name:
Piece of the kiswa (cover) of the Ka'ba

Dynasty:
Hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman

Details:
Islamic Museum, al-Aqsa Mosque / al-Haram al-Sharif
Jerusalem

Justification:
The kiswas (covers) that are removed from the Ka'ba are highly esteemed; believed to possess the beneficial power of the holy shrine.



Name:
Hasa Fortress

Dynasty:
The bridge dates to Hegira 1140 / AD 1730s; the fortress to the time of Sultan Mustafa II (AH 1170–87 / AD 1757–74) Ottoman

Details:
Hasa, Jordan

Justification:
The sultans built forts along the pilgrimage routes, they were used to protect the wells and store provisions.



Name:
The Fortress at Ma'an

Dynasty:
Hegira 937 / AD 1531 Ottoman

Details:
Ma'an, Jordan

Justification:
Ma'an was a station stop on the pilgrimage route; it later became the main stop on the Hijaz railway.



Name:
The Fortress at Ma'an

Dynasty:
Hegira 937 / AD 1531 Ottoman

Details:
Ma'an, Jordan

Justification:
Dedicatory inscription of Ottoman Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent who was the patron of Fortress Ma'an.
