

Pilgrimage | The Haram at Mecca and the Ka'ba

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Traditionally, the Ka'ba is covered by a dark, elaborately decorated kiswa (cover), a tradition that was started by a king of Himyar in Southern Arabia two centuries before the hegira. Initially, the kiswa was donated by the Prophet Muhammad and the caliphs; later it was Egypt that dispatched the kiswa every year, decorated with gold-thread panels containing Qur'anic phrases and prayers referring to the Hajj and its importance. Sent at the same time were an elaborate pair of curtains to cover the doors of the Ka'ba, and a pouch containing the key to the Ka'ba made from silver-inlaid brass and enhanced with religious quotes. The sending-off ceremony involved a big celebration in the capital, Cairo. The kiswa began its journey via the citadel forecourt accompanied by knights and officials, drums and fanfares and flanked by a huge crowd of ordinary citizens.



Name:
Key for the Ka'ba

Dynasty:
Hegira 765 / AD 1363 Mamluk

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
A key to the Ka'ba that was commissioned by Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban in 765 / 1363.



Name:
Tomb cover

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

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

Justification:
A kiswa fragment that recites the Shahada: 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.'



Name:
Tomb cover

Dynasty:
Hegira 12th / AD 18th century Ottoman

Details:
Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
The kiswa of the Ka'ba was renewed each year and the old one cut into fragments and sent over to mosques and other sites across the Ottoman Empire. Textile tomb covers such as this one were made to imitate the kiswa of the Ka'ba.



Name:
Pilgrimage proxy scroll

Dynasty:
Hegira 602 / AD 1206 Ayyubid

Details:
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Türkiye

Justification:
These images show the Holy Places to be visited in fulfilment of the duties of the Hajj.
