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CHAPTER II

Mecca and the Ways Thither

CHANGES IN THE HARAM

THE FIRST TWO successors of the Prophet at the head of the new and rapidly expanding Muslim community ruled by what might reasonably judged a consensus of that community. But with the accession of Uthman (r. 644–656 C.E.), the third of these Caliphs, as they were called, the divisive forces of ambition and dissatisfaction made their violent appearance. Uthman was murdered by political rivals, and his successor, Ali (r. 656–661), likewise came to a violent end at the hand of an assassin. Other members of the same Umayyad family to which Uthman had belonged then ascended to power, a long series of them between 661 and 749 C.E. They ruled not from Medina, however, but from Damascus. The Holy Cities were in effect abandoned politically, to be possessed, inevitably, by the forces of opposition to the regime.

Rebuilding the Kaʿba

The passage of power from the first Umayyad, Muʿawiya (r. 661–680), to his family was not an easy one. At Muʿawiya's death there was opposition to the accession of his son Yazid, opposition that eventually led to insurrection by members of the family of Ali under the banner of the Prophet's own grandson Husayn, the younger son of Ali and Fatima. Yazid destroyed the unfortunate Husayn and his supporters at Karbala in Iraq in 680, an event that won him the undying hatred of the Alids and their supporters everywhere. Yazid himself died in 683 and was succeeded by his thirteen-year-old son Muʿawiya (II), whose rule lasted only forty days. The weakness of an unpopular ruler all but invited revolt, and Umayyad governors were expelled from Basra and Kufa. In Mecca, amidst a rising tide of insurrection, Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, the son of an early hero of Islam, proclaimed himself the genuine Caliph.

Ibn al-Zubayr had revealed his designs even before the death of Yazid, and the ailing Caliph in Damascus had sent against him an army under the command of Husayn ibn Numayr. The Umayyad forces took Medina

from Ibn al-Zubayr's supporters without much difficulty, and then in August 683 they began the siege of Mecca. Stones and torches were cast down upon the city from the nearby slopes of Abu Qubays. Ibn al-Zubayr's troops took shelter in tents inside the Haram. The tents took fire, and soon the Kaʿba itself was in flames.[1]

After two months of siege, news arrived from Damascus of the death of Yazid and the uncertainties of the succession. The troubled Syrian army soon moved off; and in the peaceful interval that followed, Ibn al-Zubayr took thought of rebuilding the Kaʿba.

When the army of al-Husayn ibn Numayr left Mecca on the 24th of Rabiʿ I in the year 683, Ibn al-Zubayr called upon the elite of the people and questioned them on whether he should tear down (and rebuild) the Kaʿba. Many of them advised him against tearing it down. It was Abdullah ibn Abbas who said that he should leave it as is, as the Prophet had, because he feared that (destroying it) would set a precedent for future generations to tear it down and rebuild it. So he advised him (merely) to renovate it instead.

Ibn al-Zubayr answered: "By God, there is no one among you who will not mend the house of his parents, so how do you wish me to do otherwise with God's House, when I watch it fall apart piece by piece? When even the pigeons sit on its walls, the stones fall down."

Ibn al-Zubayr asked around for advice for days, and finally he resolved to tear down the building. He wished to be the one to rebuild it, according to what the Prophet said, on the foundations of Abraham and in the manner in which the Prophet had described it [that is, Abraham's Kaʿba] to Aisha.

The problem, of course, was that sometime before his first revelations Muhammad himself had participated in the reconstruction of the Kaʿba by the pagan Quraysh in a manner somewhat different from Abraham's original. It was on that occasion, according to a tradition transmitted by Aisha, that Muhammad said, "If your people [the Quraysh] had not just recently given up their pagan beliefs, I would have destroyed the Kaʿba and rebuilt it, restoring what they had omitted." It was on those grounds, then, that Ibn al-Zubayr decided to proceed.

He wanted to build it with wars.[2] *He sent to the Yemen for the* wars *but was told that it breaks and disintegrates and rather to build it with gypsum mortar. And he was told that the gypsum from Sanʿa was the best and so he sent 400 dinars to buy gypsum from Sanʿa and ordered that it be done quickly. He then asked some learned men from Mecca where the Quraysh got their stones and he was told of their stone quarry and so he got all that he needed.*

When the stones were collected and he was ready to begin the demolition, the Meccans evacuated the city and went to Mina, where they stayed because they were afraid a punishment would befall them for demolishing it. When Ibn al-Zubayr ordered the work of demolition to begin, no one dared to do it. When he saw this, he climbed it himself, took up the pick and started dismantling it himself. When the rest saw that nothing had happened to him, they got up to assist him.

They demolished it with the help of the people, and by the time the sun was descending, the building walls were leveled to the ground on all sides. This took place on Saturday, the fifteenth of II Jamada in the year 64 [8 February 684 C.E.]. . . . Ibn al-Zubayr, since he was asked by name not to leave them without a qibla, *put up around the Kaʿba a wooden frame to which he attached cloth curtains so that the people could circumambulate outside it and pray.*

The burning question, of course, was: Would the new, rebuilt Kaʿba be authentic? Ibn al-Zubayr invoked the best possible testimony on both his right to undertake the project and the size and shape of the new construction.

Ibn al-Zubayr said: I bear witness that I have heard Aisha say: The Prophet said: "Your people [the Quraysh] diminished the House when they built it because they could not afford the expense (of rebuilding it on Abraham's foundations). So they reduced it by some cubits in the direction toward the Hijr. And but for the fact that till recently they were unbelievers, I would myself demolish the Kaʿba and restore the reduced dimensions. I would also make two doors for it (opening) down at ground level, one toward the east for people to enter and one to the west for people to exit. And do you know [Muhammad continued] why your people raised the door (above ground level)?" Aisha said she did not. Muhammad said: "To make sure that no one but whom they wished would enter it. If they disliked a certain person's entering it, they would allow him to climb up and then, when he was about to enter, they would push him away and he would fall to the ground. If it should ever seem good to your people to demolish the Kaʿba (and rebuild it), come let me show you how much they cut off on the side toward the Hijr." And Muhammad showed them about 7 cubits.

A chance discovery then added an additional note of verification to Ibn al-Zubayr's project to restore the Kaʿba to its original form. The very foundations of Abraham's edifice were unearthed:

When Ibn al-Zubayr had leveled the Kaʿba, he discovered the foundations of Abraham which extended into the hijr *about six cubits and ten inches and were constructed like the linked necks of camels or inter-*

twined fingers so that if the hijr *was moved, all the other corners would move with it.*

He started building on that foundation and put the threshold of the door of the Kaʿba atop one layer of marble close to ground level, and he located the back door in the same manner—the threshold consisted of the long green marble stone—this (latter) in the back of the Kaʿba close to the Yemeni corner. And the building went on behind the curtains even as the people were circumambulating outside it. The building reached the height where the Black Stone[3] had to be put in its place. Ibn al-Zubayr, when he was demolishing the (old) House, had wrapped the Stone in a brocade and then placed it in a chest which he kept in his residence in the Dar al-Nadwa. He had also taken all the decorations that were in the Kaʿba and put them in the Kaʿba vault in the house of Shayba.

When the (new) building reached the level of the Black Stone, Ibn al-Zubayr ordered that it be placed between two courses of stone . . . , carved out to match (the size of the Black Stone). When the place was prepared, Ibn al-Zubayr ordered his son Abbad ibn Abdullah along with Jubayr ibn Shayba to put the Stone in a cloth. Ibn al-Zubayr instructed them: "When I begin praying the noon prayer, you carry it out and put it in its place." . . . When the prayer was begun and Ibn al-Zubayr had made his first prostration, Abbad came out of the Dar al-Nadwa carrying the Stone, and Jubayr ibn Shayba was with him. They passed through the rows of people praying and entered the curtain surrounding the building. The one who put the Stone in its place was Abbad ibn Abdullah and he was assisted by Jubayr ibn Shayba.

The Stone had been cracked by the fire into three parts. (In addition) a splinter had chipped off it and it was preserved by some of the Banu Shayba for a long time after that. Ibn al-Zubayr held it together with silver nails, except for the splinter from off its top, whose position is clear at the top of the Stone. The length of the Stone (rukn) *is two cubits and it occupies the thickness of the Kaʿba wall. The rear face inside the wall is carved something like a molar tooth with three roots. Ibn Jurayj said: "I heard some who described the color of its rear face inside the wall. Some said it was rosy, others said it was white." (Azraqi 1858: 140–144)*

A later visitor to Mecca, the Spanish poet and *littérateur* Ibn Abd Rabbihi (d. 940), passed on a tradition about an inspection of the Black Stone in Ibn al-Zubayr's day:

A narrative has been related on the authority of a Meccan who traced it up to the learned doctors of that city through an uninterrupted chain of transmitters, to the effect that they examined the Black Stone at the time when Ibn al-Zubayr pulled down the house and extended it. They measured its length and found it to be three cubits. They also found it to be

of an intensely white color except on its external side. Its blackness is said to have been due—and God knows best—to the touches and kisses it has received from the pagan Arabs and to (their) smearing it with blood. (Iqd *3.298 = Shafiʿ 1922: 428)*

Azraqi's narrative continues:

He built the Kaʿba twenty-seven cubits in height and it consisted of twenty-seven courses of stone, and the thickness of the wall is two cubits. Inside he put three pillars, while in the Age of Barbarism the Quraysh had six pillars. Ibn al-Zubayr sent to Sanʿa for the marble known as balaq *and he put it on the apertures that are on the ceiling for light. The entry to the Kaʿba used to be by a single-panel door, but he made a double door with a height of eleven cubits from the ground to the top, and he made the back door the same size. . . . Inside he made a wooden ladder at the Syrian [northwestern] corner whereby to ascend to the roof. When Ibn al-Zubayr was done building it, he aromaticized it inside and out, top to bottom, and he draped it with (the Egyptian linen cloth known as)* qubbati. *(Azraqi 1858: 145)*

"A GATE OF PARADISE": THE DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB OF ISHMAEL

Another remarkable event occurred during the reconstruction of the Kaʿba, nothing less than the discovery of the burial place of Ishmael in the *hijr*, the area at the northwestern face of the Kaʿba:

Abu al-Walid told us that he had heard from his grandfather, who heard from Khalid ibn Abd al-Rahman, (a tradition going back to) al-Mubarak al-Hassan al-Anmati, to wit, "I saw Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz in the hijr *and I heard him say that once Ishmael had complained to God of the heat of Mecca. God revealed to him that 'I will open a gate of Paradise for you in the* hijr. *A breeze will blow upon you from it from now until the Day of Judgment.' And that was the place in the* hijr *where Ishmael died." Khalid said that the opinion was that the area between the roof-gutter and the western opening of the* hijr *is where his tomb is located.*

Abu al-Walid told us that he (further) heard . . . that Ibn al-Zubayr had the hijr *dug up and discovered a basket of green stones. He asked the Quraysh about them but none of them knew anything. So he sent for Abdullah ibn Safwan and asked him. Ibn Safwan said, "That is the tomb of Ishmael, so do not move it." So Ibn al-Zubayr left it where it was. (Azraqi 1858: 219–220)*

When the constructions were complete, Ibn al-Zubayr and his followers performed the Lesser Pilgrimage with great pomp and splendor,[4] though with some innovations:

When he circumambulated around the Kaʿba, Ibn al-Zubayr touched all four corners, saying, "The touching of these two corners, the Syrian and the western, was abandoned (by the Quraysh) because the house was incomplete (without the space included from the hijr*)." The House remained as Ibn al-Zubayr built it, with people touching all the (four) corners as they circumambulated, and entering the House through the eastern door and exiting through the western door, with the doors fixed at ground level, until Ibn al-Zubayr was killed. (Azraqi 1858: 144–145)*

Despite Ibn al-Zubayr's political insurrection, the Hajj continued to be conducted under a truce amidst the hostilities. At the pilgrimage of 688, we are told, four different standards were shown at Arafat without bloodshed: those of Ibn al-Zubayr, the Kharijites, and the Shiʿites, and finally, that of the Umayyads' Syrian troops, which were attempting to dislodge the rebel from the Holy City.[5]

THE SIEGE-HAJJ OF 692

Initially, Ibn al-Zubayr's insurrection had been directed against a sickly and ineffective Yazid, but two years later the Caliphate was in the hands of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 C.E.). In 691 he entrusted the suppression of the revolt to al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (661–714 C.E.), a loyal and tough soldier and administrator who had already crushed resistance to the Umayyad regime in Iraq and Iran.

Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan entered Kufa after (the rebel) Musʿab was killed. He remained there for some days, then directed an army (to proceed) against Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. He placed al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi at its head. Al-Haytham ibn al-Aswad al-Nakhaʿi came (to Abd al-Malik) and said, "O Commander of the Faithful, direct this Thaqafi servant to take care with the Kaʿba. Order him not to startle off its birds and not to tear asunder its veils and not to bombard its stones (with the mangonel), but rather to corner Ibn al-Zubayr in (Mecca's) ravines and tunnels until he dies there of hunger or leaves it and is deposed." Abd al-Malik told al-Hajjaj, "Do that, avoid the Haram and camp in Taʾif."

Al-Hajjaj set out and reached Taʾif. He then wrote to Abd al-Malik, "If you ignore Ibn al-Zubayr, keep your hands from him, and do not order me to contest with him in battle, then his numbers and equipment will increase. So permit me to do battle with him." Abd al-Malik wrote back to him, saying, "Do whatever you think is appropriate." Al-Hajjaj then ordered his men to prepare to make the Hajj. He then came from Taʾif and sent forward the front part of his army, who set up the mangonel (manjaniq) *on Abu Qubays. (Baladhuri,* Ansab al-Ashraf *5.357–358)*

The move, we are told, was a deception. The rest of the troops thought they were going to make the Hajj; only when they reached Mina did they realize that a catapult had been set up to bombard the city. Abd al-Malik meanwhile sent the commander Tariq ibn Amr with an additional five thousand men to join the two thousand under Hajjaj's command. They arrived in January 692, and the siege of the city began at the end of March.

The eighth day of Dhu al-Hijja, and so the formal opening of the Hajj, fell on 1 May 692. The siege was lifted, or at least the bombardment was stopped, and both sides made gestures at undertaking the pilgrimage.

Al-Hajjaj led the pilgrimage that year since Ibn al-Zubayr was besieged. Tariq ibn Amr's arrival in Mecca (for the pilgrimage) took place on the new moon of Dhu al-Hijja. Al-Hajjaj did not circumambulate the Kaʿba, nor did he go to it in the ihram. *He wore a sword but (like a pilgrim) did not approach women or use perfume until Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr was killed. Ibn al-Zubayr sacrificed camels in Mecca on the day of sacrifice [the tenth of Dhu al-Hijja], but neither he nor his companions performed the pilgrimage that year because they did not stand at Arafat.*[6]

According to al-Waqidi . . . from the father of Saʿid ibn Muslim, who said: "I made the pilgrimage in the year 72 [692 C.E.]. We came to Mecca and entered it from the upper part of the city. We found the forces of Hajjaj and Tariq between al-Hajun [the site of the cemetery of Mecca] and Bir Maymun. We circumambulated the Kaʿba and (performed the 'running') between Safa and Marwa. Then Hajjaj led the pilgrimage. I saw him making the 'standing' at the hills of Arafat, on horseback, wearing a coat of mail and a neck protector. Then he went back. I saw him turn off toward Bir Maymun. He did not circumambulate the Kaʿba. His men were armed. I saw that they had a great deal of food, and I saw a caravan coming from Syria carrying food: biscuit, barley meal, and flour. I saw that his forces had plenty to eat." (Tabari, Annals *2.830–831 = Tabari XXI: 207–209)*

As soon as the pilgrims departed, the fighting resumed. Ibn al-Zubayr, we are told, did not lack for allies, some of them, like the bedouin volunteers, not much to his liking. Some were sent away. Others abandoned him, including the Abyssinians, who grew weary of the fighting, and the Kharijites, radical sectarians whose cursing of the Caliph Uthman the renegade Ibn al-Zubayr, for all his anti-Umayyad sentiment, found intolerable. His supplies, moreover, were running short, and the bombardment from the slope of Abu Qubays was having an effect.

Hisham ibn Urwa's father said, "The stones of the mangonel were thrown at the Kaʿba until the kiswa *became rent like the openings at the*

bosom of a woman's blouse. A dog was hurled by the mangonel at the Ka'ba and it toppled a pot in which we were cooking bulgar. We took the dog and found that it was fleshy (and so we ate it); it was more filling for us than the bulgar."

Uwana said that the Ka'ba was hit so often that it became shaky and fragile. A cloud with lightning and thunder appeared in the sky and a bolt of lightning hit the mangonel, burnt it and killed twelve of the people operating it. That terrified the Syrians and they stopped fighting. Al-Hajjaj said, "I am a native of the Tihama, and it is a land where thunderbolts are frequent. So do not be frightened of what you see. (Generations) before you used to make offerings and a fire would be sent down and it consumed the offering. That was a sign that the offering had been accepted." He then brought up another mangonel and the bombardment continued. (Baladhuri, Ansar al-Aashraf *5.362)*

The Syrians pressed in until Ibn al-Zubayr and his men were cornered in the Haram. Tabari's account continues, here based on the alleged testimony of an eyewitness:

I saw the gates (of the Haram) filled with Syrians on Tuesday, and Ibn al-Zubayr's forces gave up their watch stations. The enemy outnumbered them and set men, a commander and troops from one country, at every gate: troops from Hims held the gate facing the door of the Ka'ba; troops from Damascus held the Banu Shayba gate; troops from the Jordan held the Safa Gate; troops from Palestine held the Banu Jumah Gate; and troops from Qinnisrin held the Banu Sahm Gate. Al-Hajjaj and Tariq were together at the lowest part of the hollow [the valley bottom] and Marwa. Ibn al-Zubayr would attack sometimes in one area and sometimes in another. (Tabari, Annals *2.849 = Tabari XXI: 229)*

The morning of Tuesday, the 17th of I Jumada [4 October 692], al-Hajjaj seized the gates from Ibn al-Zubayr. Ibn al-Zubayr had spent most of the night praying. Then he sat with his legs braced against his belly with the shoulder belts of his sword and slept lightly. He awoke at dawn and said, "Give the call to prayer, Sa'd." The latter thereupon gave the call to prayer beside the Station (of Abraham).

After his prayers and a brief address to his troops, Ibn al-Zubayr once again took up his arms.

He attacked the enemy and got as far as Hajun. A brick was hurled at him and struck him in the face; he was shaken by it and his face began bleeding. . . . Then the enemy gathered together against him.

So Ibn al-Zubayr fell, and it was Tariq ibn Amr who provided his epitaph:

When the news (of Ibn al-Zubayr's death) reached al-Hajjaj, he prostrated himself. Together with Tariq ibn Amr, he went and stood over him. Tariq said, "Women have borne none manlier than he." Al-Hajjaj said, "Will you praise one who disobeys the Commander of the Faithful?" "Yes," said Tariq. "He has freed us from blame; were it not for his (valor), we would have no excuse. We have been besieging him for seven months. He had no defensive trench, no fortress, no stronghold; yet he held his own against us as an equal, and even got the better of us whenever we met with him." Their words were reported to Abd al-Malik, who declared Tariq right. (Tabari, Annals *2.850–851 = Tabari xxi: 229–232)*

THE RESTORATION OF AL-HAJJAJ

So the Haram was once again in the hands of the Umayyads, though with considerable damage to the shrine. Almost immediately, the question of the reconstructed Kaʿba arose. Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr's head was sent to Damascus, together with a request for instructions.

When al-Hajjaj entered Mecca he wrote to Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan that Ibn al-Zubayr had added to the House what does not belong to it, and that he had introduced into it a second door. Abd al-Malik wrote back to him, "Close the western door that was opened by Ibn al-Zubayr, and tear down what he has added to it from the hijr*, and use the material to restore the building to the way it was." Al-Hajjaj demolished six cubits and one span of it from (the part) next to the* hijr*, and he rebuilt it on the diminished foundation of the Quraysh, and closed it with the material from the demolition. He closed up the door that was in the back of the building and left everything else untouched. (The result is that) to this day everything in the building was built by Ibn al-Zubayr except for the wall in the* hijr*, which was built by al-Hajjaj. He closed off the door that was in its back as well as the area from under the threshold of what is today the eastern door down to ground level, (a space which) measures four cubits and one span. This is all of what al-Hajjaj built. The step inside (the Kaʿba) and the double door that are there today were also built by al-Hajjaj. (Azraqi 1858: 145–146)*

The struggle over the Kaʿba was one of authenticity—one door or two, ground-level or elevated entry, connection with or separation from the semicircular *hijr* wall to the northwest—matters we are in no position to judge. In question was not Muhammad's Kaʿba, of course—the Prophet had nothing to do with the design of the building—but the extent to which the Quraysh in pre-Islamic days had departed from Abraham's design. There were traditions one way and the other on the subject, though we cannot say whence they arose. The point was conservatism, preserving the received architectural tradition, much as Zerubbabel and the return-

ing Israelites attempted to do vis-à-vis the Temple of Solomon.[7] The Haram has been remodeled many times, most recently and massively by the Saudis in 1957; but the Kaʿba in its midst, what the nineteenth-century Dutch Orientalist Snouck Hurgronje called "a monument of old Arabia preserved with antiquarian solicitude," remains much the same structure it became when Muhammad assisted in its reconstruction. The changes introduced by Ibn al-Zubayr are only a vivid memory.[8] Even Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walid (r. 705–715), both prodigious builders in the Abode of Islam, contented themselves with simply beautifying the Haram. Uthman's low outer wall was raised and turned into a covered portico—as it has remained, in one form or another, ever since—and adorned in some parts with gilt, marble facing, and mosaics.[9]

Harun and Zubayda

The fall of the Umayyads finally came about in 749 C.E., and they were succeeded by the Abbasids. The Abbasids too ruled their empire far from the Holy Cities; but unlike the Umayyads, they made frequent pilgrimage there and put huge sums into the expansion and adornment of both Mecca and Medina. The chroniclers of both the city, like Azraqi, and of the Abbasid Caliphs, like Tabari, are filled with stories of the Abbasids' architectural and personal investment in the Hijaz cities and the Hajj, and the most generous and pious among them were the celebrated Harun al-Rashid (r. 764–809 C.E.) and his almost equally celebrated wife, Zubayda. The historian Masʿudi (d. 956) quotes an earlier historian's summary of their generosity:

> *Harun al-Rashid was scrupulous in fulfilling his duties as a pilgrim and in waging Holy War. He undertook public works, the construction of wells, cisterns, and forts on the road to Mecca as well as inside that latter city and in Mina, Arafat, and Medina. . . . The epitome of generous charity in this same reign was manifested in the person of Umm Jaʿfar Zubayda, the daughter of Jaʿfar and the granddaughter of (the Caliph) Mansur. This princess had numerous caravanserais built in Mecca and she filled this city and the pilgrim road which bears her name with cisterns, wells, and buildings that still stand today. (Masʿudi,* Muruj *8.294)*

The tracks across steppe areas are generally determined by the pace of the traveler and the presence or absence of water near the limits of a day's march. Water sources are scattered thinly over much of the peninsula, and so transhumance, travel, and even commerce were possible across the steppe, from the Iraqi sown lands, for example, into the Hijaz, or from the Persian Gulf littoral into the lava lands of Syria.[10] The coming of Islam, which soon turned Medina into a capital city and Mecca into the

object of pilgrimage, put a new premium on crossing the steppe. At first we hear few details of it, though people must have been passing to and fro between Mecca and Medina and the new settlements in Syria and Iraq, whether with an army or on pilgrimage. But it is not surprising to discover, when details are given—on Ali ibn Abi Talib's march from Medina to Kufa in 656, for example, or his son Husayn's 679 trek from Mecca to his own destruction in Iraq—that most followed the same line of "stations" that later constituted the central section of the main pilgrimage route between Kufa and the Hijaz: Rabadha, Hajir, Fayd, Zarud, Thaʿalabiyya, Zubal, and Aqaba.[11]

There are not many signs that the Umayyads paid particular attention to this route. Their power was, after all, based in Syria and not Iraq. But with the accession of the Abbasids in 749 and the shift in power from Damascus to Baghdad, there was a new interest in facilitating the passage between Kufa (along with Basra further south, the jumping-off point for the voyage across the steppe) and the Holy Cities of the Hijaz. In 751, the very first of the Abbasid line, al-Saffah (r. 749–754), ordered that fire signals and milestones (*amiyal)* be established all the way from Kufa to Mecca.[12] All we know about Mansur's (r. 754–775) efforts is that he built some forts along the route, but al-Mahdi (r. 775–785) was active in clearing and leveling the way to the Holy Cities. The passage could be made so quickly—at least under demonstration circumstances—that al-Mahdi had ice delivered to him in Mecca from Iraq during his pilgrimage in 776.[13]

In 777 al-Mahdi undertook a grander and more practical enterprise on behalf of the Iraqi pilgrims.

*In this year [161 A.H. = 777–778 C.E.] al-Mahdi ordered the building of castles [*qusur, *fortified posts] on the road to Mecca more extensive than the castles that Abu al-Abbas (al-Saffah) had built from Qadisiyya to Zubala, and he ordered that Abu al-Abbas' castles should be enlarged, and he left the staging posts that Abu Jaʿfar (al-Mansur) had built as they were. He ordered the building of reservoirs at each watering place and the renewal of milestones and cisterns and the building of watering troughs with the reservoirs. He put Yaqtin ibn Musa in charge of this, and he continued with it until the year 171 [787–788 C.E.].*[14] *(Tabari,* Annals *3.486)*

Finally, al-Mahdi connected Mecca with the Yemen by the imperial post service (*barid*).[15]

In this year [166 = 781–782 C.E.] al-Mahdi ordered the establishment of the post between the city of the Prophet [Medina] and Mecca and the Yemen by mule and camel, and the post had not been established there before. (Tabari, Annals *3.517)*

One reason for the early Abbasids' interest in the Hajj route from Iraq was their own penchant for leading the Hajj in person. Harun, for example, began his reign with the avowed intention of leading the pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy war against the Byzantines in alternative years.[16] He did not achieve his scheme, but he did make the pilgrimage on six (or, according to others, nine) separate occasions.[17] His final one in 804 was, as it turned out, the last Hajj ever performed by a Caliph. His wife, Zubayda, made five or six pilgrimages, the first in the company of Harun, when, in fulfillment of a vow, he made his notorious Hajj of 790 entirely on foot, though the path across the steppe was cushioned for him with woolen mats spread out along the way.[18]

Husband and wife were both lavish in their gifts to the Holy Cities, but Zubayda's name in particular is attached to two projects long remembered by grateful pilgrims: her provision of abundant drinking water for Mecca, and her improvements along the Kufa-Hijaz route. We are far better informed on the queen's waterworks than on her benefactions along the pilgrims' way, but her name is firmly attached to that latter, and later pilgrims and travelers called the route from Kufa to the Holy Cities simply "Zubayda's Way" (*darb Zubayda*).[19] We are told that she built water tanks, wells, residences, and rest stops at ten sites, and perhaps more, along the way, and three major stations were named after her.[20]

THE PATHS TO MECCA

The medieval Abode of Islam appears to be filled with travelers, not merely the rich and the powerful like Harun and Zubayda, but simple pilgrims attempting to fulfill their religious obligation to make the Hajj to Mecca at least once in their lives. They are mostly mute, those plain Hajjis, but some at least of the Muslims in constant motion across the Islamic lands were considerable literary men who later fashioned their journeys into books. But they too were often pilgrims as well, and three of the most important of them have left circumstantial accounts of not only Mecca but also, since they were professional travelers, of the ways thither. All three of them—Nasir-i Khusraw (Hajj of 1050), Ibn Jubayr (Hajj of 1184), and Ibn Battuta (Hajj of 1326)—will be cited at length in this chapter and the following.

Whereas travel literature is a personal statement, there also exists in Arabic a body of geographical writing not limited to personal experience but committed to the more general purpose of describing the entirety of the Abode of Islam, with a particular emphasis on its roads and their stations. The very earliest example of the genre, by Ibn Khurdadhbih (d. 893–894), is in fact called *The Book of Routes and Provinces*, as are many of its successors, including those of Istakhri (ca. 951) and Ibn Hawkal

(ca. 977). Some are rather dry repertoires; but others, like the *Book of Countries* by Ya'qubi (d. 891–892) and the *Finest Structure in the Knowledge of Climes* by al-Muqaddasi (d. 988–989), are filled with social, historical, and architectural information of great interest, though the description of any given place is generally more succinct than that by one of the professional travelers.

All of these authors were obviously interested in the Holy Cities and Holy Land of Islam, though from different perspectives. Ibn Hawkal, for example, here attempts to lay out the routes and distances between the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and other centers in the Abode of Islam:

These then are the distances in the interior (of Arabia). From Kufa to Medina is about twenty stages. From Medina to Mecca is a distance of ten stages by the main road. From Kufa (directly to Mecca) is a route which is about three stages shorter (than if you go by way of Medina): at the entry to the native place of the Naqra this road turns from the direction of Medina to end up at the native place of the Banu Sulaym, then to Dhat Irq and then to Mecca. The road from Basra to Medina is eighteen stages and crosses the Kufa road in the vicinity of the native place of the Naqra. The road from Bahrayn to Medina is about fifteen stages; that from Raqqa is about twenty stages . . . and the distance is the same from Damascus to Medina and from Palestine to Medina. From Egypt to Medina, following the coast, is twenty stages. Travelers (from Egypt) meet those coming from Syria at Aila. Pilgrims from the Maghrib join the Egyptians, but at times their respective caravans travel separately, though with common way-stations. (Ibn Hawkal 1964: 1:39)

"Stages" is, of course, a rather imprecise measure of distance. It is, presumably, the distance covered by a caravan in one day. That distance is generally reckoned at twenty-four or twenty-five miles, where a mile is counted at a thousand paces. The distance can be converted into time if we accept Richard Francis Burton's equation:

I have estimated the pace of a Hijazi camel, laden and walking in caravan line, under ordinary circumstances, at two geographical miles an hour. A sandy plain or a rocky pass might make a difference of half an hour each way, but not more. (Burton 1893: 1:244)

To maintain this pace, then, the caravan traveler was in the saddle—or litter—for twelve hours out of every twenty-four. We return to Ibn Hawkal:

The pilgrims from Egypt and Palestine, when they have passed Midian [the northwestern Hijaz], have a choice of two routes to arrive at Medina.

The first is by Bada and Shaghb, a fortress in the desert which the Umayyads had granted to Zuhri and where his tomb is located, and from there you reach Medina by way of Marwa. The other route goes along the coast and comes to Juhfa, where there meet the pilgrims from Iraq, Damascus, Palestine and Egypt. The route from Raqqa is no longer used in our day, and there are only very small groups of Arab [perhaps here = bedouin] pilgrims who accomplish the pilgrimage in small units. With that exception, all the other routes are used for passage. (Ibn Hawkal 1964: 1:39–40)

From Aden to Mecca takes nearly a month of travel. There are two routes: one along the coast, which is the longer. This is the Great Road of the Tihama. Whoever takes it passes through San'a, Sa'da, Jurash, Bisha, Tabala and so arrives at Mecca. The other route, different from the Tihama way, goes by way of the flatlands and it is called Sudur. It follows the edge of the mountains for about twenty stages; it is thus the shorter. It passes through the tribes and settlements of the Yemen and is the way taken by notables.

The inhabitants of the Hadramawt and Mahra cross their land to reach the main route between Aden and Mecca, and this traverse takes twenty-two stages, with the result that their entire trip (to Mecca) lasts more than fifty days.

The route from Oman crosses the desert and is a difficult one by reason of the desolation of the region and the lack of inhabitants. Their only way (of getting to Mecca) is going by sea to Jidda because if you go across the flatlands of the coast of Mahra and the Hadramawt as far as Aden or the Aden route, the trip is too long. So it is only rarely used. The same is true of the way from Oman to Bahrayn: it is a bad road and is little practical because of the internal quarrels among the Arabs (along the way). (Ibn Hawkal 1964: 1:49)

This is a large view of the Hajj routes, calculated in the main from their distant points of origin. But the greatest difficulties of the trip were not so much in those outlying stages as in the interior routes of Arabia, and particularly, as we shall see below, within the Hijaz itself.

THE WAYS FROM IRAQ

We begin with the great pilgrim roads from Iraq to Medina and Mecca. The chief Iraqi point of departure for the nine-hundred-mile trek to the Holy Cities was Kufa. There the pilgrim struck out upon the already noted Darb Zubayda, "Zubayda's Way," so called because of the improvements financed by Harun al-Rashid's queen in the early ninth cen-

tury.[21] As we have seen, the Iraqi path to Mecca across the north Arabian steppe began to draw official attention and, quickly, royal investment under the early Abbasids. Milestones, fire beacons, wells, cisterns, forts, and rest stations dotted the various stages along the route. Even before Zubayda, the way from Iraq to Mecca and Medina was clearly the best furnished—and most carefully protected—of all the Hajj roads.

Its protection may also have been the road's curse. The increased ease and speed of the journey and the very public examples of the early Abbasid Caliphs, who often made the pilgrimage in person, all encouraged a growing number of pilgrims to make the long journey through central Arabia. And with the growth in the number and wealth of the pilgrims inevitably came the increased attention of the predatory bedouin who lived along the route. Serious trouble began to be reported as early as the Caliphate of al-Wathiq (r. 842–847 C.E.), and thereafter the Sulaym, Asad, Hilal, Tayy, Harb, and Khafaja bedouin all show up in the historians' accounts of troubles along the way.[22] The remedies were the standard ones: send troops or money. But the obvious vulnerability of this long thin line through the desert, with its exposed water sources, meant that such measures would be only partially successful.

To the bedouin depradations in the ninth century were added the somewhat more ideologically motivated attacks of the Qarmatians in the tenth.[23] The Qarmatians, who in 930 C.E. took and sacked Mecca and carried off the Black Stone,[24] were bold enough and strong enough to attack not only passing pilgrim caravans but even the fortified stations built to protect those voyagers.[25] With the accession of the Buyids in Iraq, and particularly Adud al-Dawla (r. 978–982), the threat to the pilgrims along the Darb Zubayda appears to have abated, and the work of restoring the facilities at imperial expense was taken up again.

In the course of time, there came to be two routes from Iraq, depending on whether one took up the journey across the desert at Kufa or Basra. The first, the Darb Zubayda, passed through Fayd just to the south of Hayl in the Jabal Shammar region; the more southern Basra route passed by Dir'iyya, the later Saudi capital. The two routes came together at Dhat Irq, two days out of Mecca to the northeast.[26]

The itineraries, stop by stop, are laid out in the various "Roads of the Realm" books of the ninth century, but a far more graphic appreciation is provided by actual travelers over those roads, as we shall see. The Iraqi caravan set out, then, from Kufa or Basra and generally crossed the Najd to Medina, though an Iraq-Mecca route was not unknown. For the rest of the circuit, Medina to Mecca and return, the caravan kept its integrity, though it was possible to switch into and out of it. Ibn Jubayr, for example, arrived from Egypt by boat, went up in nondescript company to Mecca, and, after completing his Hajj there, joined the Iraqi caravan in

1184 for its trip back to Medina and subsequently remained with it on its return to Baghdad. Ibn Battuta, on the other hand, came to Medina in 1326 with the Syrian caravan from Damascus. He continued with that company on the Darb al-Sultani to Mecca (see below), but for his return he switched to the Iraqi caravan, with whom he went back to Medina and thence on to Kufa and Iraq.

The Panorama of the Iraqi Caravan

Both Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta left panoramic views of the Iraqi caravan after their departure from Mecca for Medina. Here is Ibn Jubayr's description:

This assemblage of people of Iraq, Khurasan and Mossul, as well as those of other countries who have joined them to accompany the Amir of the Hajj, made up a crowd whose number is known to God alone. The vast plain (at Khulays) was filled with them, and the flat immensity of the desert was too narrow to encompass them. You could imagine the earth attempting to maintain its balance under the crowd's heaving and waves streaming from the force of its currents; you could picture in this crowd a sea swollen with waves, whose waters were the mirages and whose ships were the camels, their sails the lofty litters and round tents. They all went forward gliding in and out of a great rising of clouds of dust, their sides colliding as they passed. On the immense extent of the plain you could see the thrust of a crowd filled with pain and fright and the knocking together of litters. Who has not seen with his own eyes this Iraqi caravan has not experienced one of the genuine marvels of the world worth the effort of describing and whose telling can seduce the listener by its marvelous character.

Consider what happens if one of the travelers assigned to a section of the caravan should have to leave it without taking note of a landmark to guide him back to his place. He would lose his way, would perish, and be reckoned among those lost in the desert. Occasionally distress of this type brings one of the travelers to the tent of the Amir to request his assistance. The latter sends one of his information officers, one of those who have been appointed to pass on his orders, to find out the traveler's name, the name of his cameleer and of his country, and then to take him up behind him on his camel and make a circuit of the noisy mob. This officer announces all that in a loud voice, pointing out the lost person, giving the name of his cameleer and country until, perchance, the cameleer happens upon him and takes the man back into his own hands. If it does not happen that way, that is the end of the man's arrangement with his cameleer, unless he later happens upon him by chance along the way.

Another marvelous thing about this caravan is that, despite its huge size, which constitutes it a world unto itself, after the baggage has been unloaded and people are in their campsites, once the Amir has the drums called kus *sounded to signal the departure, between that moment and the one when the camels are loaded with their packs, their saddles and their riders, the interval is no longer than the time it takes to twice say "No." Scarcely have they been sounded the third time and the animals are on the road. This is the result of firm planning and the detailed precautions that are taken for the trip.*

This caravan travels at night to the light of torches, which people on foot carry in their hands, and you will not see one litter which is not preceded by a torch. Thus people travel as it were among wandering stars which illuminate the depth of the darkness and which enable the earth to compete in brightness with the stars of heaven. (Ibn Jubayr 1949–1951: 213–215/Ar. 184–186)

As we shall see, Ibn Battuta came to Mecca with the Syrian caravan from Damascus; but he left eastward, in the company of the Iraqi caravan headed across the Darb Zubayda:

On the twentieth day precisely of Dhu al-Hijja [17 November 1326] I went out of Mecca in company with the commander of the caravan of Iraq, the Pehlewan Muhammad al-Hawih,[27] a man of Mossul, who occupied the office of commander of the pilgrims after the death of Shaykh Shihab al-Din Qalandar. Shihab al-Din was an open-handed and worthy man, who was held in high honor by his sultan, and used to shave his beard and eyebrows after the fashion of the Qalandaris.[28]

When I left Mecca (God Most High ennoble her) in company with the above-mentioned Amir Pehlewan, he hired for me the half of a double litter as far as Baghdad, paying its cost from his own purse, and took me under his protection.

We went out to the Bottom of Marr, after performing the farewell circuit with a host of men of Iraq, Khurasan, Fars and other eastern lands, of uncountable multitude, (so many that) the earth surged with them (as the sea surges) with dashing waves, and their advance was like the march of high-piled clouds. Anyone who left the caravan for natural want and had no mark by which to guide himself to his place could not find it again for the vast number of people. Included in this caravan were many water-carrying camels for the poorer pilgrims, who could obtain drinking water from them, and other camels to carry provisions (for distribution) as alms and to carry medicines, potions and sugar for those who should be attacked by illness. Whenever the caravan halted, food was cooked in great brass cauldrons, called dasts, *and supplied from them to the poorer pilgrims and those who had no provisions. With the caravan was also a num-*

ber of spare camels for the carriage of those unable to walk. All this was due to the benefactions and generosity of Sultan Abu Saʿid. . . .

This caravan contained also animated bazaars and great supplies of luxuries and all kinds of food and fruit. They used to march during the night and light torches in front of the file of camels and litters, so that you saw the countryside gleaming with light and the darkness turned into radiant day. (Ibn Battuta 1958: 249–250)

Joining the Persian Caravan at Hayl (1879)

In January 1879, Wilfrid and Lady Anne Blunt were guests of Muhammad ibn Rashid, the powerful Amir of Hayl and the Jabal Shammar. During their stay there was camped outside the town a caravan of Persian Hajjis returning from Medina to Najaf, the shrine-tomb of Ali in Iraq. The Blunts hastened to join its protection for their ongoing voyage of discovery.

We left Hayl by the same gate at which we had entered it, what seemed like years before, but instead of turning towards the mountains, we skirted the wall of the town, and further on palm gardens, which are its continuation, for about three miles down a ravine-like wadi. Then we came out on the plain again, and . . . halted for the last time to enjoy the shade, for the sun was almost hot, before joining the pilgrim caravan, which we could see like a long line of ants traversing the plain between us and the main range of Jabal Shammar.

It was, without exception, the most beautiful view I ever saw in my life, and I will try to describe it. To begin with, it must be understood that the air, always clear in Jabal Shammar, was this day of a transparent clearness, which probably surpasses anything seen in ordinary deserts. . . . For this is the very center of the desert, four hundred miles from the sea, and nearly four thousand feet above sea level.

Before us lay a foreground of coarse reddish sand. . . . Across this sand lay a long green belt of barley, perhaps a couple of acres in extent, the blades of the grain brilliantly green, and just having shot up high enough to hide the irrigation furrows. Beyond this, for a mile or more, the level desert fading from red to orange, till it was again cut by what appeared to be a shining sheet of water reflecting the deep blue of the sky—a mirage, of course, but the most perfect illusion that can be imagined. Crossing this, and apparently wading in the water, was the long line of pilgrim camels, each reflected exactly in the mirage below him with the dots of blue, red, green or pink, representing the litter or tent he carried. The line of the procession might be five miles or more in length; we could not see the end of it. Beyond again rose the confused fantastic mass of the sap-

phire colored crags of Jabal Aja, the most strange and beautiful that can be imagined—a lovely vision. (Blunt 1881: 307–309)

We were in front of the Hajj when we came to this tell (Tell al-Sayliyya), and we waited on top of it while the whole procession passed us, an hour or more. It was a curious spectacle. From the height where we were, we could see for thirty or forty miles back over the plain, as far as Jabal Aja, at the foot of which Hayl lies. The procession, three miles long, was composed of some four thousand camels (nor was this the whole Hajj caravan), with a great number of men on foot beside. In front were the dervishes walking very fast, almost running; wild, dirty people, but amiable, and quite willing to converse, if they know Arabic; then a group of respectably dressed people walking out of piety. . . . Sometimes they chant or recite prayers. All these devotees are very rude to us, answering nothing when we salute them, and being thrown into consternation if the greyhounds come near them, lest they should be touched by them and defiled.

Some ways behind these forerunners comes the berak, *or banner, carried in the center of a group of mounted dromedaries magnificently caparisoned and moving on at a fast walk. These most beautiful creatures have coats like satin, eyes like those of a gazelle, and a certain graceful action which baffles description. Not even the Arabian horse has such a look of breeding as these thorough-bred camels. They are called* naʿamiyya *because one may go to sleep while riding them without being disturbed by the least jolting.*

After the banner comes the mass of pilgrims, mounted sometimes two on one camel, sometimes with a couple of boxes on each side, the household furniture. The camels are the property of the bedouin, mostly Shammar. . . . They follow their animals on foot, and are at perpetual wrangle with the pilgrims, although, if they come to blows, Ibn Rashid's police mounted on dromedaries interfere, deciding the quarrel in a summary manner.

The Persian riding on a camel is the most ridiculous sight in the world. He insists on sitting astride, and seems absolutely unable to learn the ways and habits of the creature he rides; and he talks to it with his falsetto voice in a language no Arabian camel could possibly understand. . . . The better class of pilgrims, and of course all the women except the very poor, travel in litters—panniers, of which a camel carries two—covered over like a tradesman's van with red or blue canvas. One or two persons possess tahterevans, *a more expensive kind of conveyance, which requires two mules or two camels, one before and one behind, to carry it. In either of these litters the traveler can squat or even lie down and sleep. The camels chosen for the litters are strong and even-paced; and some of these double panniers are fitted up with a certain care and elegance, and the luxury of*

Persian rugs and hangings. A confidential driver leads the camel, and servants sometimes walk beside it. One of the pilgrims keeps a man to march in front with his nargileh, *which he smokes through a very long tube sitting in the pannier above. (Blunt 1881: 316–319)*

A Visit to the Persian Caravan Camp

As we shall see below, the British travelers William Palgrave and Richard Burton both had occasion to meditate on the fortunes of Shi'ite pilgrims in Arabia in the mid-nineteenth century. Palgrave also had the opportunity to visit the Persians' camp outside of Burayda and note how business was conducted in the Hajj camp town:

At this hour [shortly after sunrise] we would often thread the streets by which we had first entered the town (of Burayda), and go out betimes to the Persian camp, where all was already alive and stirring. Here are ranged on the sand baskets full of eggs and dates, flanked by piles of bread and little round cakes of white butter; bundles of firewood are heaped close by, and pail of goats' milk or camels' milk abound. And amid all these sit rows of countrywomen, haggling with tall Persians or with the dusky servants of Taj Jahan, who in broken Arabic try to beat down the prices, and generally end by paying only double what they ought.

Not a few Burayda townsmen are here, chatting or bartering, and Bedouin, switch in hand. If you ask any chance individual among these latter what has brought him hither, you may be sure beforehand that the word camel in one or other of its form of detail, will find place in the answer. Criers are going up and down the camp with articles of Persian apparel, cooking pots and ornaments of various descriptions in their hands, or carrying them off for higher bidding in the town. For what between the extortions of Muhanna and the daily growing expenses of so long a sojourn at Burayda, the Persians were rapidly coming to the end of their long purses and short wits, and had begun selling off whatever absolute necessity could dispense with as superfluous, to obtain wherewithal to buy a dish of milk or a bundle of firewood. Hence their appearance was a ludicrous mixture of the gay and the ragged, of the insolence of wealth and the anxious cringe of want; they were, in short, gentlemen in very reduced circumstances, and looked what they were. (Palgrave 1883: 175–177)

THE SYRIAN HAJJ

We know more about the Syrian caravan than the Iraqi one because it started at a more considerable place (Damascus), had a longer continuous history, was led in Mamluk and Ottoman times by the Governor of Syria,

and is, for its later stages, well documented in the court archives of the city. Finally, there were more foreigners in Damascus than in either Kufa or Basra, non-Muslims who found in the Hajj an exotic caravan phenomenon worth commenting upon.

Coming and Going in 1432

One of those foreigners was Bertrandon de la Brocquière, himself a Christian pilgrim to the East and recently arrived in Damascus from Jerusalem in 1432:

On the day after my arrival (in Damascus) I saw the caravan return from Mecca. It was said to be composed of 3,000 camels; and in fact it was two days and as many nights before they had all entered the town. This event was, according to custom, a great festival. The Governor of Damascus, attended by the principal persons of the town, went to meet the caravan out of respect to the Alcoran, which it bore. This is the book of law which Muhammad left for his followers. It was enveloped in a silken covering, painted over with Moorish inscriptions; and the camel that bore it was in like manner decorated all over with silk.

This sounds something like the empty palanquin called the Mahmal, better known to us from the Egyptian caravans (see below), though certainly borne by the Syrian one as well.

Four musicians and a great number of drums and trumpets preceded the camel and made a loud noise. In front and around were about thirty men, some bearing cross-bows, others drawn swords, others small harquebuses, which they fired off every now and then.[29]

Behind this camel followed eight old men mounted on the swiftest camels, and near them were led their horses, magnificently caparisoned and ornamented with rich saddles, according to the custom of the country. After them came a Turkish lady, a relation of the Grand Seigneur, in a litter borne by two camels with rich housings. There were many of these animals covered with cloth of gold.

In what follows, Bertrandon, or his source, has got the facts badly garbled. The tomb of Muhammad was not in Mecca—as often asserted in medieval Europe—but in Medina, and the house of God built, according to Muslim tradition, by Abraham was in Mecca, not Medina.

The caravan was composed of Moors, Turks, Berbers, Tartars, Persians and other sectaries of the prophet Muhammad. These people pretend that, once having made a pilgrimage to Mecca, they cannot be damned. Of this I was assured by a renegade slave, a Bulgarian by birth, who be-

longed to the lady I have mentioned. He was called Hayauldoula, which signifies in the Turkish language "servant of God" [actually, "Life of the Realm"] and claimed to have been three times to Mecca. I formed an acquaintance with him because he spoke a little Italian and he often kept me company in the night as well as in the day. In our conversations I frequently questioned him about Muhammad and where his body was interred. He told me he was at Mecca; that the shrine containing the body was in a circular chapel, open at the top, and that it was through this opening the pilgrims saw the shrine; that there were among them some who, having seen it, had their eyes thrust out because, they said, after what they had just seen the world could no longer offer them anything worth looking at. There were in fact in this caravan two persons, one of them sixteen and the other twenty-two or twenty-three years old, who had thus made themselves blind. Hayauldoula told me also that it was not at Mecca where pardons for sin were granted, but at Medina, where St. Abraham built a house that still remains. The building is in the form of a cloister, of which pilgrims make the circuit.

Bertrandon joined the caravan cortege as it continued north from Damascus:

I will describe the order of its march. The caravan has a very large drum, and the moment the chief orders the departure, three loud strokes are beaten. Every one of them then makes himself ready and, when prepared, joins the file without uttering a word. Ten of our people would, in such cases, make more noise than a thousand of theirs. Thus they march in silence, unless it be night or that anyone should sing a song celebrating the heroic deeds of their ancestors. (Bertrandon de la Brocquière = Wright 1848: 301–302, 309)

Ibn Battuta Sets Off from Damascus on the Hajj

The Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta went to Mecca in the same Syrian caravan a century before Bertrandon watched its reentry into Damascus. After an abortive attempt to reach the Hijaz by one of the Egyptian routes (the one followed by Ibn Jubayr in 1184 up the Nile and thence east to Aydhab on the Red Sea), Ibn Battuta finally began afresh from Damascus in Syria in 1326 C.E. It is a mercy that he did so, for a great deal of Ibn Batutta's account of the Holy Cities is lifted, often word for word, from his predecessor Ibn Jubayr, and it seems likely that he would have done the same with the Red Sea crossing. Here, however, Ibn Battuta is on his own.

When the new moon of Shawwal appeared in the above-mentioned year [1 September 1326], the Hijaz caravan went out to the outskirts of

Damascus and encamped at the village called al-Kiswa (ten miles south of Damascus), and I set out on the move with them. The commander of the caravan was Sayf al-Din al-Juban, one of the principal amirs, and its chief justice was Sharaf al-Din al-Adhruʿi (from Adhruʿ) in the Hawran. . . . My journey was made with a tribe of bedouin Arabs called al-Arajima, whose amir was Muhammad al-Rafiʿ, a man occupying a high position among the amirs. We marched from al-Kiswa to a place called al-Sanamayn, a big place [twenty miles south of Kiswa], and marched on from there to the township of Zurʿa [the modern Ezra, fifteen miles south of Sanamayn], a small place in the district of Hawran. After a halt in its vicinity we traveled on to the town of Busra [twenty-seven miles south of Ezra]; it too is a small place. It is the usual practice to stop there for four nights, so that any who have remained behind at Damascus to finish off their business may make up on them.

This extended halt outside the starting point to enable the travelers to organize themselves, a common practice of large caravans, later took place at Muzayrib, nearer to Damascus. The growing number of pilgrims, and the journey's increasing administrative and mercantile complexity—Muzayrib became a considerable market—may have required a stop somewhat closer to the metropolis.

It was at Busra that the Apostle of God, May God bless him and give him peace, came before his mission, while engaged in trading on Khadija's account, and in the town (there is shown) the place where his she-camel couched, over which a great mosque has been erected. The inhabitants of the Hawran flock to this town (with their produce) and the pilgrims supply themselves here with provisions for the journey. They travel next to the Pool of Ziza [twenty miles south of Amman], where they stop for a day, then go on to al-Lajjun, where there is running water, and thence to the castle of al-Karak. (Ibn Battuta 1958: 158–159)

Ludovico di Varthema Departs Damascus in 1503

In 1503, on the 8th day of April, the caravan being set in order to go to Mecca, and I being desirous of beholding various scenes . . .

So begins the extraordinary account of the first European to visit the Muslim holy cities of the Hijaz. We know nothing about Ludovico di Varthema except what can be gleaned from his travel account, which was first published in Italian in 1510 and subsequently in many European languages. A Venetian, the son of an Italian physician, likely a former soldier, and a married man with children, he traveled "to behold the various kingdoms of the world. . . . And inasmuch as all countries have been very

much laid open by our people, I deliberated in my own mind that I should see those which had been least frequented by the Venetians." This intent carried him first to Alexandria, thence to Cairo, by sea again to Beirut, inland to Aleppo, and, in 1503, to Damascus:

. . . and not knowing how to set about it, I formed a great friendship with the captain of the Mamluks of the caravan, who was a Christian renegade, so that he clothed me like a Mamluk and gave me a good horse, and placed me in company with the other Mamluks, and this was accomplished by means of the money and other things I gave him. (Varthema 1863: 16)

Although he does not say so, it is thus palpably certain that Varthema, like so many of his Christian European successors, went to Medina and Mecca in the disguise of a Muslim. Indeed, there was only one other way to go: as a genuine Muslim.

Varthema has another distinction. Most of the Europeans who followed him, from Pitts to Burton, went by the Red Sea route from Egypt to Yanbu or Jidda. Varthema was the first and, until Burckhardt went part of the way in 1812 and Doughty accompanied the Hajj caravan from Damascus to Mada'in Salih in 1876, the only European to go overland through Syria to the Hijaz. His account continues:

In this manner we set ourselves on the way, and traveled three days to a place called Muzayrib, and there we remained three days, in order that the merchants might provide themselves, by purchase, with as many horses as they required.

On the 11th [that is, the 14th] of April, the said caravan departed Muzayrib; there were 35,000 camels, about 40,000 persons, and we were 60 Mamluks in guard of the said caravan. One third of the Mamluks went in advance of the caravan with the standard, another third in the center, and the other third marched in the rear. . . . From Damascus to Mecca is a journey of forty days and forty nights; thus, we set out from Muzayrib in the morning and traveled for twenty hours. At that point certain signals made by the captain were passed from band to band that the whole company should stop where they found themselves, and they pass twenty-four hours in unloading and feeding themselves and their camels. And then they make signals, and the camels are immediately laden again. And you must know that they give the said camels for food only five loaves of barley-meal, uncooked, and each a [ball of paste meal] of about the size of a pomegranate, and then they mount on horses and journey all night and all the following day for the said twenty-two hours, and then for twenty-four hours do as before. And every eight days they find water, that is, by digging in the earth or sand; also, certain wells and cisterns are found, and

at the end of eight days they stop for one or two days, because the said camels carry as great a burden as two mules, and they only give the poor animals drink once in every three days. When we halted at the said waters we always had to fight with a vast number of Arabs, but they never killed more than one man and one lady, for such is the baseness of their minds that we 60 Mamluks were sufficient defense against 40,000 or 50,000 Arabs; for pagans, there are no better people with arms in their hands than are the Mamluks. You must know that I had excellent experiences of these Mamluks during the journey. (Varthema 1863: 16–19)

It is not easy, or sometimes even possible, to follow the precise stages of Varthema's southward journey; but somewhere in the difficult country around Aqaba, perhaps in the notorious chasm of the "Steps of Aqaba," the fatal dangers of the Hajj voyage became real indeed:

Then we passed that valley, which was at least twenty miles, and there died there from thirst thirty-three persons, and many were buried in the sand who were not quite dead, and they left only their faces uncovered.

The caravan had already had experience of bedouin in the vicinity of Muzayrib, but their encounter here at the entry to Midian was far more threatening.

Afterwards we found a little mountain, near which was a well, whereat we were well pleased. We halted upon the said mountain. The next day, early in the morning, there came 24,000 Arabs, who said we must pay for their water. We answered that we could not pay, for the water was given by God. They began to fight with us, saying that we had taken their water. We fortified ourselves, and made a wall of our camels, and the merchants stood within the said camels, and we were constantly skirmishing, so that they kept us besieged two days and two nights, and things came at last to the state that neither we nor they had anything to drink. They had completely surrounded the mountain with people, saying that they would break through the caravan.

Not being able to continue the fighting, our captain consulted with the Moorish merchants and we gave them (the Arabs) 1,200 ducats of gold. They took the money and then said that 10,000 ducats of gold would not pay for their water, and we knew that they wanted something else besides money. So our prudent captain arranged with the caravan that all those men who were capable of bearing arms should not ride on the camels, and that each should prepare his arms. The morning having come, we put forward all the caravan, and we Mamluks remained behind. We were in all three hundred persons, and we soon began to fight. One man and one woman were killed by bows on our side, and they did us no further harm. We killed of them 1,600 persons. Nor is it to be wondered at that we

killed so many of them: the cause was that they were all naked and on horseback, without saddles, so that they had a difficulty in turning on their way. (Varthema 1863: 20–21)

Ibn Battuta on the Road in Syria and Arabia

We shall encounter Varthema later at both Medina and Mecca, but we now return to Ibn Battuta's narrative of his own Hajj journey through what is today southern Jordan:

The caravan stopped outside al-Karak for four days, at a place called al-Thaniyya, and made preparations for entering the wilderness. Thence we traveled to Maʿan, which is the last town in Syria, and descended through the Pass of al-Sawan into the desert.

Though Maʿan later became an important market town on the Syrian caravan route, it was in Ibn Battuta's day the pawn of the bedouin tribes that surrounded it like a hostile sea. The "Pass of al-Sawan" was probably the same dangerous descent referred to by Varthema.

After a march of two days we halted at Dhat Hajj, a place of subterranean waterbeds with no habitations, then on to Wadi Baldah (but there is no water in it), and then to Tabuk. This is the place raided by the Apostle of God [in 631 C.E.]. It has a spring which used to yield a scanty supply of water, but when the Apostle of God went down to it and used it for his ablutions, it gave an abundant flow of running water and continues to do so to this day.

The huge caravan encamps near to the spring referred to, and every one of them slakes his thirst from it. They remain here four days to rest themselves and water the camels and lay in supplies of water for the fearsome wilderness between Tabuk and al-Ula. It is the practice of the water-carriers to take up their positions at the side of the spring, and they have tanks made of buffalo hides, like great reservoirs, from which they water the camels and fill the large waterbags and the ordinary waterskins.[30] *Each amir or person of rank has a (private) tank from which his camels and those of his retinue are watered, and their waterbags filled; the rest of the people arrange with the water-carriers to water the camel and fill the waterskin of each person for a fixed sum of money.*

The caravan then sets out for Tabuk and pushes on speedily night and day, for fear of this wilderness. Halfway through is the valley of al-Ukhaydir, which might well be the valley of Hell, God preserve us from it. One year the pilgrims suffered severe distress in this place, by reason of the simoom (or "poison") wind which blows here, their water supplies dried up, and the price of a drink of water rose to a thousand dinars, but both

seller and buyer perished. The story of this is inscribed on one of the rocks of the valley. Going on from there, the caravan halts at the Pool of Muʿazzam, a vast basin called after al-Malik al-Muʿazzam of the house of Ayyub [Sultan of Damascus, 1218–1227], in which the rain-water collects in certain years, but which is generally dry in others.

On the fifth day after leaving Tabuk, they reach the well of al-Hijr—the Hijr of Thamud [now Madaʾin Salih]—which has an abundance of water, but not one of the pilgrims draws from it, however violent their thirst, following the example set by the Apostle of God (God bless him and give him peace), when he passed it by on his way to Tabuk. . . . At this place are the dwellings of Thamud, in some hills of red rock. They are hewn out and have carved thresholds, such that anyone seeing them would take them to be of recent construction. Their bones lie crumbling inside these houses, "verily in that is a warning example" (Quran 3:11). The place of the kneeling of the she-camel of Salih (on him be peace) is between two hills there, and in the space between them are the traces of a mosque, in which the pilgrims perform a prayer.[31]

From al-Hijr to al-Ula is half a day's journey or less. Al-Ula is a large and pleasant village [eighteen miles south of Madaʾin Salih], with palm gardens and watersprings at which the pilgrims halt for the space of four nights. They provision themselves and wash their clothes, and also deposit here any surplus of provisions they may have, taking with them only the amount of their strict necessities. The inhabitants of this village are trustworthy persons. This is the limit to which the Christian merchants of Syria may come, and beyond which they may not pass, and they trade in provisions and other goods with the pilgrims here.

The caravan then sets out from al-Ula and encamps on the day following the resumption of its journey in the valley known as al-Itas (?). It is a place of violent heat, in which the fatal simoom wind blows. It blew up one year on the caravan, and none but a few of the pilgrims escaped with their lives. . . . After this they encamp at Hadiyya, which is a place of subterranean waterbeds in a valley; they dig pits in it and the water comes up, but brackish. On the third day they alight outside the sanctified city (of Medina), the holy and illustrious. (Ibn Battuta 1958: 160–163)

THE HAJJ ROUTE FROM EGYPT

The normal overland route from Cairo to the Hijaz was the same path whose "stations" are described by most of the Arab geographers, whose work in fact chiefly consists in enumerating such stops along the way. The route was divided into thirty-four stages, each about twenty-eight to thirty miles in length. The journey was not continuous, however: with a

couple of rest periods of a few days en route, it took roughly forty days to go out and about the same time to return.

The pilgrims collected at Birket al-Hajj a few miles north of Cairo and then, after about four days, generally proceeded in no particular order to Ajrud, a marshaling ground about fifteen miles northwest of Suez. There the Caravan Commander began to arrange this amorphous crowd into what would be their order of march (see below), and thereafter no one was permitted to leave the ranks without permission.

One or two hours after sunrise, the pilgrims, now constituted a caravan, proceeded either south to Qulzum (Suez) or, more generally, directly eastward. The routes came together again at Thughrat Hamid and then crossed the Sinai through Qala'at al-Nakhl to Aqaba.[32] This constituted only one-quarter of the "Egyptian Way": from Aqaba the caravan descended to al-Bad', remained close to the coast as far south as Rabigh, and then joined the Sultan's Way between Medina and Mecca.

The Duration

As in the case of the Syrian caravan, we have substantial and continuous records for the pilgrimages from Cairo to Mecca. A rough estimate of its average duration, as has been said, would be about three months for the round trip: forty days out and forty back. The Mahmal, the decorated, camel-borne palanquin that signified Egyptian sovereignty, generally left Cairo sometime around the twentieth of Shawwal; its return depended on the conditions, human and natural, along the route, but the twenty-second or twenty-third of Muharram was considered fairly standard.[33]

The eleventh-century Persian traveler Nasir-i Khusraw gives us his own calculations for the journey out, by land and by sea, starting from Suez:

> *Whoever wants to go to Mecca from Egypt must go east. From Qulzum [Suez] there are two ways, one by land and one by sea. The land route can be traversed in fifteen days but it is all desert and three hundred parasangs long [about 1,050 miles]. Most of the caravans from Egypt take that way. By sea it takes twenty days to reach al-Jar, a small town in the Hijaz on the sea. From al-Jar to Medina it takes three days. From Medina to Mecca it is one hundred parasangs [about 350 miles]. (Nasir-i Khusraw 1986: 43)*

The time it took for the caravan to travel from Cairo or Damascus to Mecca was subject to outside influences as well, one of which was the commercial interests of the carriers. Although such influences were not so apparent in Nasir's day, they became increasingly important as the commercial life around the Red Sea quickened. The following story, told by Selim Sawwaf, one of the last of the camel contractors for the Damascus

caravan, to Christine Phelps Grant in Damascus in 1935–1936, illustrates the degree to which the caravan had passed from government to private control:

The camel-masters originated a law which was, at least in more recent times [ca. 1875–1910], ruthlessly enforced: namely, that the entire trip should never take more than forty days and forty nights to perform. Five days, not counted in the forty, were spent in Medina, but that was the only exception countenanced. No halts of more than one hour were allowed by day, and a great part of the journey was performed by night. Sometimes, if the caravan accomplished a thirty mile stage with exceptional speed, in less than the allotted time (in, for example, ten or nine hours instead of twelve), a halt of two or three hours was granted at the first watering place encountered therein. Otherwise, on every third day, an hour's rest at some village was arranged. But that was all. Were a person to fall ill, or to die, or a woman to weaken under the strain, even so, no exception could be made to this stringent regulation. Once embarked upon the pilgrimage, it behoved the pilgrim to persevere to the bitter—sometimes very bitter—end. Anyone who failed in this self-imposed duty, and was unable to travel, was left behind: even, upon occasion, to the mercy of the marauding Bedouin.

When at last they reached their objective and finally arrived at Mecca, the caravan stayed there for more than three weeks. Only a short time was exacted in the Holy City for religious purposes (all the prescribed duties of the Hajj, that is to say, could be performed within three, or at most six days), but a long rest was allowed the pilgrims: partly for the purposes of trade and commerce, and partly so that both men and beasts might have a chance to recuperate from the long and exhausting trip.

The return journey was made exactly as the outgoing one had been, in forty days, the only change in the routine being a shortened stay at Medina. According to Selim Sawwaf, the camel-owners and contractors were solely responsible for this forty-day test of endurance; and the reason he gave was that a great and disproportionate expense should be incurred by them for every extra day spent on the road, beyond the time they had contracted for. . . . The lines in the Quran (2:196) which urge pilgrims to "hasten quickly" when they approach the Holy Places . . . also furnished the camel-masters with a religious argument and pretext for insisting on the maximum speed during the entire journey. (Grant 1937: 229)

The Pilgrimage of Nasir-i Khusraw (1048)

Nasir-i Khusraw, a Persian bureaucrat from eastern Iran, began his journeys in 1045 C.E. Although he made the Hajj four times in the course of the next few years, it was the fourth one, when he went from Cairo via

Aydhab and Jidda to Mecca in 1049, that he turned into a book. It is a pity he chose to describe that particular way—he had previously (1048) come from Medina and would return again from Jerusalem with the Syrian caravan—because Ibn Jubayr left us a far more detailed account of that same route.

THE HAJJ ANNOUNCEMENT IN CAIRO

Nasir had his own interest in detailing the journey he did. He provides, for example, the earliest account (1048) of the formal Hajj preparations in Cairo, with the Sultan formally and officially in control.

It is customary for a representative of the Sultan to appear in the mosques in the middle of the month of Rajab and proclaim the following: "O company of Muslims! The Pilgrimage season is at hand, and the Sultan, as usual, has undertaken the outfitting of soldiers, horses, camels and provisions." During Ramadan the proclamation is repeated, and from the first of Dhu al-Qa'da the caravan moves out. The daily disbursement to the soldiers (accompanying it) for fodder is one thousand Maghribi dinars, over and above the twenty dinars each man receives per diem for the twenty-five days until they reach Mecca, where they stay for ten days. Thus, with the twenty-five days it takes them to return, they are gone for two months, and sixty thousand Maghribi dinars are spent for provisions, not counting miscellaneous disbursements for rent, bonuses, stipends and camels that die.

In the year 1048 C.E. an edict of the Sultan [al-Mustansir, Fatimid ruler of Egypt, 1036–1094] to this effect was read to the people: "The Prince of the Faithful proclaims that in this year, owing to drought and the resulting scarcity of goods, which has caused the deaths of many, it is unwise for pilgrims to undertake the journey to the Hijaz. This we say in Muslim commiseration." Therefore the pilgrimage was held in abeyance until the next year, although the Sultan did send the covering for the Ka'ba as usual, which he does twice a year. This very year, since the covering was being sent via the Red Sea, I went along. (Nasir-i Khusraw 1986: 58–59)

A QUICK TRIP TO THE HIJAZ

Nasir-i Khusraw made his first and very hurried visit to Mecca in 1048. Although it constituted an official pilgrimage, it was very much shorter than the Hajj he would complete in 1050.

On the 18th of April 1048 C.E. I left Egypt and we reached the Red Sea (at Qulzum) on the 25th. From there we traveled for fifteen days by boat until we arrived at a town called al-Jar. From there it is a four-day journey to Medina, which is a town with damp and salty soil on the edge of the desert. It has running water, though not much, and is a palm grove. . . .

We stayed in Medina for two days; then, as time was short, we left. The road leads to the east. Two stations outside of Medina is a mountain and a defile called Juhfa, which is the miqat *for Syria, the Maghrib and Egypt—the* miqat *being the place where the pilgrims put on the* ihram *[the ritual pilgrimage garb]. They say that one year many pilgrims had stopped there when suddenly a flash-flood swept down and killed them all, which is why it is called Juhfa ["sweeping away"]. From Medina to Mecca is one hundred parasangs [approximately 350 miles], but the road is rocky and it took us eight days.*

On Sunday 23 May 1048 we arrived in Mecca and entered through the Safa Gate. As there had been a drought in Mecca that year, four pounds of bread cost one Nishapuri dinar. The "sojourners" were leaving the city, and no pilgrims had come from anywhere at all. On Wednesday, with the help of God, we completed the pilgrimage rites at Arafat. Afterwards we stayed at Mecca for only two days. . . .

When I returned to Egypt, it had been seventy-five days (since I left). This year thirty-five thousand people came to Egypt from the Hijaz; and since they were all hungry and naked, they received clothing and a pension from the Sultan until the next year, when the rains came and food was once again plentiful in the Hijaz to support these people. The Sultan gave them all clothing and gifts and sent them back home. (Nasir-i Khusraw 1986: 59–60)

The Nile Route and the Red Sea

At the beginning of the twelfth century C.E. the Western intruders called Crusaders held not only Jerusalem but also large areas of northern and coastal Syria and even areas east of the Jordan. There they built the fortress of Montreal (1115) in the oasis of Shawbak and another called "Petra of the Desert" (1142) three hours east of the Dead Sea, with lesser posts at an even further remove from these bases. By 1116 C.E. the Seigneurie of Montreal extended all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba and included the fortress of Aila there.

Thus, between 1116 and 1187 the Frankish Crusaders controlled the land routes between Syria and Egypt. If a caravan wished to try the passage, it had to detour far to the east of the Crusader fortresses in the Transjordan and then try to slip through the net south of the Dead Sea. The economic consequences were considerable, of course. But more to the point, the Frankish presence in southern and eastern Jordan forced the Syrian Hajj caravans far out into the desert and constrained the Egyptians, who were by then normally crossing the Sinai and passing through Aqaba into the Hijaz, to scout for entirely new routes. That is why the author of our best eyewitness account of a medieval pilgrimage to Mecca,

the Spaniard Ibn Jubayr, had to make the difficult overland journey from the Nile to the Red Sea coast at Aydhab.

Ibn Jubayr was not the first to describe the passage over land from Qus to Aydhab and then the voyage to Jidda. The route into Upper Egypt had been mentioned in the previous century by the travelers Ibn Rusteh and, as we have seen, Nasir-i Khusraw, who gives a somewhat perfunctory description. It was in fact a somewhat round-about way of getting to Mecca. The overland trip from the Nile to the Red Sea was difficult and dangerous, and Aydhab had the well-merited reputation of being one of God's least favored places. But what made the route attractive, indeed necessary, was the Crusader presence in Sinai and east of the Red Sea. Thus, for about two hundred years (1062–1266), Aydhab replaced Aqaba as the transit port of Red Sea traffic, both commercial and religious. Once the Crusaders were gone and the Muslim Mamluks firmly in control, the Sinai route became popular once more. Aydhab was destroyed by the Mamluk Sultan Barsbay in 1426, and the port never recovered; later commerce on the western shore of the Red Sea went instead to Suwakin farther south.

Ibn Jubayr was born at Valencia or Xativa on 1 September 1145. He left Granada on 1 February 1183 and did not return until 25 April 1185. In the interval he had visited Alexandria and Cairo, gone up the Nile to Qus, crossed the desert to Aydhab, voyaged over the Red Sea to Jidda, spent more than eight months at Mecca, and completed the Hajj and Umra in 1184.

Ibn Jubayr left Mecca on 5 April 1184 in the pilgrim caravan to Iraq, spent five days visiting Medina, and then followed the classical route to Baghdad, where he stayed only five days before going on to Mossul. From there he passed into Syria at Aleppo, went up the Orontes Valley to Hama and Homs, and then reached Damascus, where he remained for two months (July–September 1184). After visiting Tyre, he embarked at Acre in October and did not reach Messina until December, after a long and difficult crossing that ended in a shipwreck. Ibn Jubayr remained three and a half months in Sicily awaiting favorable winds, then without further adventures reached Cartagena on 18 April 1185, whence he returned to Granada.

We begin not with the beginning of Ibn Jubayr's work but with his arrival in Aydhab, a port town on the African coast of the Red Sea and the maritime point of departure for travelers to the Hijaz.

On the afternoon of Saturday we entered Aydhab, an unwalled city on the shore of the Sea of Jidda; its houses are for the most part mud huts, though one sees some few more recent constructions of masonry. It is one of the most frequented ports in the world since ships from India and

Yemen end their journey there and depart again, to say nothing of the ships of pilgrims departing and returning. It is situated in a wilderness, without vegetation, and one eats there nothing that has not been imported. The inhabitants enjoy, nonetheless, an easy life, thanks to the pilgrims. First, they profit directly from each pilgrim because they collect a fixed tax on all the provisions carried by these latter, though it is not very high when compared to the tribute which was in existence until it was abolished by Salah al-Din. . . .[34] *Second, they make money on the pilgrims by reason of the* jalba, *which are their boats. They exact considerable sums for carrying the pilgrims to Jidda and bringing them back when they have finished their pilgrimage. There is no one among the better-off citizens of Aydhab who does not have one or two* jalbas *which bring them in a large income. (Ibn Jubayr 1949–1951: 78–79/Ar. 69)*

Ibn Jubayr is normally an objective and dispassionate reporter. Or he was until he reached his destination on the Red Sea:

The people of Aydhab treat the pilgrims in an unspeakable manner: they load them into their jalbas, *one made to sit atop the other, and they pack them in as if they were cages filled with chickens. What impels them to act in this way is their greed and their desire to rent their skiffs. They make up the purchase price on one trip and so they have little care what the sea does after that.*

Of all the lands of God, the one that most merits a scourge where the sword has replaced the whip is indeed this one. For anyone who is able, it is better not to visit it but rather to join, via Syria and Iraq, the Amir of the Baghdad caravan. And if the pilgrim cannot do this on his way out, he may use it at least at the end of the Hajj, when the pilgrims disperse. He should make his way with the Amir al-Hajj to Baghdad and thence to Acre. He can go from there, if he wishes, to Alexandria or Sicily, or anywhere else. . . . And if his trip is extended by this detour, this is little compared to the price he would pay at Aydhab and its vicinity!

The people who live there belong to a tribe of blacks called the Beja, who have a sultan chosen from among their number, who lives with them in the neighboring mountains. Sometimes they come into the town to speak with the governor. . . . This race of blacks lives worse than animals, and is their inferior in intelligence; they have no religion save the formula asserting God's uniqueness, which they pronounce to display that they are Muslims; that apart, there is nothing in their beliefs or in their conduct which is either acceptable or licit. Men and women go around completely naked, with only a ribbon to conceal their sexual parts; and for the most part they do not even bother with that. They are, in a word, an immoral people and it would be no sin to call the curse of God down upon them.

On Monday, the 25th of Rabiᶜ I [18 July 1183], we boarded a jalba to make the crossing to Jidda. But we remained that day in port because the wind had fallen and the sailors were absent. The next day, Tuesday morning, we hoisted sail under the benediction of God and with the hope of His favorable assistance. The extent of our stay in Aydhab, not counting that Tuesday, was twenty-eight days; it will be held in our account before God, for the miserable life we led there, the horror of our situation, the undermining of our health because of the lack of appropriate nourishment. What is one to expect from a city where everything is imported, even the water, and water of a type that renders thirst more pleasant to the heart. Who would blame someone who turns away from the city saying, "Foul water, the sky in flames." Staying there is one of the deepest pits with which the way to the Holy House, may God increase its glory, is strewn. May He increase the rewards of the pilgrims for what they have endured, particularly in this evil city. . . . May He free the pilgrims from a stay there by rendering usable the direct way to His Holy House, that is, from Cairo by way of the Aqaba or Ayla to the Holy City of Medina, a short trip during which the sea is on his right and the Jabal Tur [the traditional Mount Sinai] is on his left. The Franks have a strongly guarded fortress in the vicinity, which prevents us from following this route. (Ibn Jubayr 1949–1951: 81–83/Ar. 71–73)

Ibn Battuta tried to pass the same way in 1326 but found it impossible:

At length, after traveling fifteen days (overland from the Nile), we reached the town of Aydhab, a large town, well supplied with fish and milk; dates and grain are imported from Upper Egypt. Its inhabitants are the Bejas, black-skinned people who wrap themselves in yellow blankets and tie headbands, each about a fingerbreadth wide, around their heads. They give daughters no share in their inheritance. . . . One third of the city belongs to (the Sultan of Egypt) al-Malik al-Nasir, and two thirds to the king of the Beja, who is called al-Hadrabi.

On reaching Aydhab we found that al-Hadrabi, the sultan of the Beja, was engaged in hostilities with the Turks [that is, the Mamluk troops of the Sultan of Egypt], that he had sunk their ships and the Turks had fled before him. It was impossible for us to make the sea-crossing, so we sold the provisions we had made ready, and returned to Upper Egypt. (Ibn Batutta 1958: 68–69)

The Sinai Route

Ibn Jubayr ended his description of Aydhab with the prayer, "May God free the pilgrims from a stay there by rendering usable the direct way to His Holy House." His prayer was answered in 1266, when the Mamluk

Sultan Baybars sent the ceremonial curtain (*kiswa*) for the Ka'ba by the Sinai route, which thereafter became once again the normal pilgrimage route from Egypt to Medina and Mecca, though Central and West African pilgrims continued to use what was for them the shorter Red Sea land-sea route.

THE EGYPTIAN HAJJ CARAVAN DEPARTS (CA. 1575)

We can observe the departure of the Egyptian caravan in the company of the anonymous European who was with it sometime about 1575 and whose account was included by Hakluyt in his *Voyages*:

The Captain (of the Caravan) and all his retinue and officers resort unto the castle [that is, the citadel] of Cairo before the Pasha, which gives every man a garment, and that of the Captain is wrought with gold, and the others are served according to their degree. Moreover he delivers unto him ye Chisva Talnabi [Kiswat al-Nabi], *which signifies in the Arabian tongue the "garment of the Prophet." This vesture is of silk, wrought in the midst with letters of gold, which signify:* la illa ill' alla Mahumet Resullaha: *that is to say, there is no god but God and his ambassador Mahumet. This garment is made of purpose to cover from top to bottom a little house in Mecca standing in the midst of the Mesquita [mosque], the which house, they say, was builded by Abraham or by his son Ishmael. After this he delivers to him a gate made of purpose for the aforesaid house, wrought all with fine gold and being of excellent workmanship, and it is a thing of great value. Besides he delivers unto him a covering of green velvet made in the manner of a pyramid, about nine palms high, and artificially wrought with most fine gold, and this is to cover the tomb of their prophet within Medina.*

These precious objects are carried in procession from the Pasha's residence on the Citadel to a mosque near the Bab al-Nasr. They are stored in this mosque until the pilgrim caravan begins to form at Birca.

Then the Captain departs with his company, and taking the vestures out of the Mesquita (at the Bab al-Nasr), carries the same to the aforesaid place of Birca, where the Captain having pitched his tent with the standard of the Grand Signor over the gate, and the other principal tents standing about his, stays there some ten days and no more. In which time all those resort thither that mean to follow the Caravan in this voyage to Mecca. Where you shall see certain women which intend to go on this voyage accompanied with their parents and friends mounted upon camels, adorned with some many trifles, tassels and knots, that beholding them in same a man cannot refrain from laughter.

The last night before their departure they make great feasting and triumph within the Caravan, with castles and other infinite devices of fire-

works, the Janissaries always standing about the tent of the Captain with such shouting and joy that on every side the earth resounds, and this night they discharge all their ordnance, four or six times, and after the break of day upon the sound of a trumpet they march forward on their way.

It is to be noted that from Cairo to Mecca they make 40 days journey or thereabout, & that same great days' journeys. For the custom of the caravan is to travel much and rest little, and ordinarily they journey in this manner. They travel from two o'clock in the morning until the sun rising, then having rested till noon, they set forward, and so continue till night, & then also rest again, as is abovesaid, till two of the clock. And this order they observe till the end of the voyage, never changing the same, except in some places, whereof we will hereafter speak, where for respect of water they rest sometimes a day and a half, and this they observe to refresh themselves, otherwise both man and beast would die. (Anon. Hakluyt 1927: 3:179–180)

SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

The precautions described by the anonymous pilgrim making the Hajj from Cairo in the last quarter of the sixteenth century have particularly to do with the last three-quarters of the journey, from Aqaba southward along the Red Sea hinterland.

And because the caravan goes always along the Red Sea bank, which in going forth they have on their right hand, therefore the two hundred Janissaries parted into three companies go upon their left hand well armed and mounted upon camels bound one to another, for upon that side is all the danger of thieves, and on the other side no danger at all, the Captain of the Caravan always going about his people, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, never keeping any firm place, being continually accompanied by the Chaus and 25 Sipahi, armed and mounted upon dromedaries, and 8 musicians with viols in their hands, which cease not sounding till the captain take his rest, upon whom they attend, until such time as he entereth his pavilion, and then licensing all his attendants and followers to depart, they go each man to their lodging. (Anon. Hakluyt 1927: 3:180)

We cannot identify the exact stopping places from this account, nor indeed from any of the medieval geographers, who supply copious names but never quite identical ones.[35] In any event, this route, like all the other overland paths, fell into increasing dissuetude with the growth of maritime traffic across the Red Sea and then into almost complete oblivion as steam replaced sail. This, for example, is how British intelligence rated the

last stages of the Egyptian overland way, those from Aqaba southward to Rabigh, in the opening years of the twentieth century:

The track southward from Aqaba is the Egyptian Hajj route, and, as such, has been provided by wells at all stages; but since it has ceased to be followed by the Mahmal, or by any large body of pilgrims under official escort, the wells and rest-stations have fallen into decay, especially on the Midian coast. Otherwise it is easy going, and as far as Yanbu is comparatively safe from any but irresponsible footpads. From Yanbu onwards, security depends on the attitude of the Zubayd Harb (bedouin). (Hogarth 1917: 82)

Africans on the Hajj

John Lewis Burckhardt explored large tracts of Nubia before working his way eastward to Suwakin, where he took ship to Jidda in July 1814. In the region called Taka, between the Nile and the Red Sea in what is today the Sudan, he paused to take stock of the African pilgrims in his company and their ways to the Holy Cities of Arabia.

We had now with us eighteen or twenty Takayrna, *or Negro pilgrims. Takruri, the singular of this name, is not derived from a country called "Takrur," as is generally supposed in the East, and which has misled all the Arabian geographers, but from the verb* takurrar, *to multiply, renew, to sift, to purify, to invigorate, i.e. their religious sentiments, by the study of the sacred book, and by pilgrimage. The appellation is bestowed on all Negroes who come west, in search of learning . . . or for the Hajj, of whatever country they may be. They do not call themselves by this name of Takruri, which many assured me they had not heard of till they reached the limits of Darfur. All these pilgrims can read and write a little; . . . I never found any of them quite illiterate. After making some progress in the schools of their country—schools being met with in all the Muslim countries of Africa—they proceed to Mecca for the Hajj, or in order to study the Quran and the commentaries upon it, in that place and Medina; or to Cairo, for the same purpose; but the greater part go for the Hajj; at present there are not more than twelve in the mosque al-Azhar in Cairo, and I did not find above double that number in the great mosque of Mecca. . . .*

The greater part of the Takruris who visit Mecca come from the schools of Darfur, the principal of which are at Konjara, in the neighborhood of Kobba. Those from the most western countries who pass this road are from Bahr al-Ghazal and Bagarma. All the black Hajjis from the west of Bagarma, from Burnu as far as Timbuctu, either travel with the Fezzan, or great Maghribi pilgrim caravan, or proceed by sea from the

coast of Barbary. Their motives for undertaking the journey are partly a sincere desire to fulfil the precepts of their religion, and partly the ambition of enjoying afterwards the credit which the Hajj confers in their own country upon those who have performed it, and which of course is in proportion to the difficulty of the journey.

The Takruris seldom travel alone, at least they never set out alone on their journey; they generally form parties of about a dozen, and as opportunity offers, join some caravan on the road, or proceed by themselves. Their usual route to Mecca is by Assiut, by Shendi or by Sennar (on the Blue Nile). Those from the most western countries meet at Darfur; after which, only such as can afford to travel with the Darfur caravan, which requires capital sufficient to buy camels and provisions for the journey through the desert, repair to Assiut, from whence they proceed to Jidda by way of Qusayr (on the Red Sea).

The pilgrims who go by Sennar come from Kordofan and pursue their journey by three different routes; to wit, 1) through the interior by the Mogren (river) to Taka, and from thence to Suwakin; I do not over-rate the number who pass this way at five hundred annually; . . . they never travel in large parties, but a few are seen almost daily passing along the banks of the river. . . . From Taka they proceed with the caravans (across country) to Suwakin, where they wait till they find a ship to convey them to Jidda. The usual fare is from one to two dollars.

Distance is scarcely ever taken into consideration by these pilgrims, nor indeed by any bedouin or traders in these countries; fatigue they care little about; loss of time, still less; one object only occupies their attention, under the two forms of direct gain and the saving of expense. . . . It will readily be conceived that the danger and fatigue incident to the journey prove fatal to great numbers of the pilgrims: perhaps one-sixth fall victims to their zeal. The greater part of the diseases by which they are attacked on the road arise from their being almost destitute of clothing; many perish in the desert through want and fatigue, and others are murdered; but as all who die on the road are looked upon as martyrs, these contingencies have little effect in diminishing the annual numbers, or in diverting others from their purpose. Although the greater number of the pilgrims are stout young men, yet it is not rare to see women following their husbands to the Hajj; and almost incredible as it may seem, one of the men who joined our caravan at Taka was blind. He . . . was continually led by a stick, which one of his companions held in his hand as he marched before him. I saw this man afterwards begging in the mosque at Mecca, and again at Medina, sitting on the threshold of the temple, exclaiming, as he appealed to the charity of the Hajjis, "I am blind, but the light of the word of God and the love of His Prophet illumine my soul and have been my guide from the Sudan to this tomb." He received very

liberal alms, and would probably return to his home richer than he left it. (Burckhardt 1819: 406–408)

THE INTERIOR ARABIAN ROUTES

At the beginning of the First World War the British intelligence and diplomatic venture in Cairo known as the Arab Bureau collected all the information then available on the Hijaz and published it in 1917 under the title of *Handbook of the Hijaz.* Its main author was the archeologist David Hogarth (1862–1927)—the British, like the Germans, quite unselfconsciously combined archeology and intelligence gathering in the Middle East before the war—Britain's principal authority on Western Arabia. In that same year Hogarth's protégé T. E. Lawrence, another former archeologist, went to the Hijaz and set in motion what came to be known as the "Arab Revolt."

Among other things, the *Handbook* considered the passages across the Hijaz, which were, as the author noted, none other than the routes of pilgrimage:

The presence of the goals of Muslim pilgrimage in Hijaz causes tracks to converge on it from all quarters. . . . The points toward which all main tracks are directed are Medina and Mecca. . . . The tracks come from the center (Hayl, Qasim, and Riyadh), from the north (Syria and Egypt), from the west coast and from the south (Asir and Yemen). None of these reaches Mecca and Medina without crossing some desert and more steppe, and, except between Jidda and Mecca and along the coast line, all encounter hilly country and some difficult mountain passes. In general, the Hijaz routes are among the least safe of the Arabian peninsula from nomad attack. (Hogarth 1917: 84)

By 1917, the great bulk of the pilgrims arrived in Arabia by sea and disembarked, if they were from Egypt or from Syria-Anatolia via Egypt, at Yanbu on the coast opposite Medina. If they were among the increasing number of pilgrims coming from India and Indonesia, they likely landed, together with African pilgrims crossing over from Suwakin, at Jidda, the port of Mecca. Thus the importance of the two east-west passages: Yanbu to Medina and Jidda to Mecca.

Yanbu to Medina

The route from Yanbu to Medina was identical for much of its extent with the Darb Sultani from Medina to Mecca, which veered off to the south toward the end (see below). The English soldier George Forster

Sadleir came down by it in 1819 after his epic trek from Qatif on the east coast of Arabia across the peninsula to Medina:

September 15th (1819) —Marched from Bir Ali (the first stop on the west after leaving Medina) at 7 A.M., our route westerly through the mountains. About two miles from Bir Ali we came to the spot at which two Turks had been wounded a few days previously. Two mountains of very difficult ascent command this pass within pistol-shot. Here the bedouin have been posted awaiting the arrival of any solitary traveler who might chance to pass, and whom they might be capable to overpower. Continuing our route through the valley, we found . . . the rocky mountains of a more considerable elevation. We arrived at 5 P.M. at a spot which was marked by a small white tower on the top of a mountain to the west, at the floor of which we found a deep well of good water.

September 16th —Marched at 5 A.M.; continued our route through the mountains in the same valley. These mountains are high, rocky and barren . . . the road gravelly and good; the mountains to the southwest impassable. We halted at 12 at a solitary well which afforded but a scanty supply of water, the demand for which became very pressing before evening.

September 17th —Marched at 4 A.M., and continuing our route through the valleys as yesterday; we reached Judayda at 12. It is a miserable village of huts built of stone; one part of the village is built up against the side of the mountain, but the lower village, which has several date gardens, lies in the hollows. . . . The sun does not shine in the valley more than three hours a day, which renders it a very unhealthy spot. The tribes which reside in the mountains . . . have made paths along the tops of the mountains where they can assemble a large force, and the entrance to their valley was once strongly defended. . . . On the advance of Tussun Pasha (against the Wahhabis in Medina in 1812) they defended their valley so resolutely that he did not effect his passage without the loss of many men. We proceeded on to the village of Hamra, which we reached at 12, and here found a tolerable supply of water.

September 18th —Marched at 4 A.M. Almost every person had to complain of the loss of camels or baggage or horses. The Turks [the Turco-Egyptian military detachment with whom Sadleir was traveling] never place any guard or watch during the night, and during last night the thieves had been particularly active. . . . At 7 A.M. we crossed a hill from which we descended by a very rugged, difficult, rocky road, which here divides into two branches: the one turning off to the south [that is, the Darb Sultani] runs to Mecca and Jidda and unites with the one which leads from Humra to the above places; the other road is that which we followed to the west, and which led us to Bir al-Sultan, where we arrived at 11 A.M. The well was very deep and full of good water. . . . We en-

camped in a small sandy plain. The road to Badri is to the south of this range. There the two caravans of pilgrims, the Egyptian and Damascus, always join and proceed to Mecca.

September 19th —Halted this forenoon to forage the camels. The Magribi bedouin (accompanying us) were sent on in advance to enable us to proceed with the more ease in the afternoon. We marched at 3 P.M., continued our route till daybreak, when we emerged from the hills and halted at Malka, the wells of which are brackish.

September 20th —Marched from Malka. Hence the country assumes a new aspect, and opens into an extensive plain bounded to the west by the Red Sea. Arrived at Yanbu at 10 A.M. (Sadleir 1866: 108–110)

The Routes between Mecca and Medina

The obligation of the pilgrimage had only to do with the rites at Mecca, of course, but the overwhelming number of pilgrims included Medina, with the Prophet's own mosque and his tomb within it, on their itinerary. Pilgrims coming down by land from Syria, and most of those from Iraq, stopped at Medina on their way to Mecca. For Egyptian pilgrims, the African voyagers coming across the Red Sea, and those arriving from the Yemen, a visit to Medina might more conveniently follow the Hajj. Richard Burton rapidly surveys the various ways of passing between the two Holy Cities.

Four roads lead from Medina to Mecca. The Darb al-Sultani *or "Sultan's Highway" follows the line of the coast; this general passage has been minutely described by my exact predecessor.*[36] *The* Tariq al-Ghabir, *a mountain path, is avoided by the Mahmal and the great caravans on account of its rugged passes; water abounds along the whole line, but there is not a single village and the Subh bedouin who own the soil are inveterate plunderers. The route called* Wadi al-Qura *is a favorite with the dromedary caravans; on this road are two or three small settlements, regular wells, and free passage through the Banu Amr tribe. The* Darb al-Sharqi *or "Eastern Road," down which I traveled, owes its existence to the piety of the Lady Zubayda, wife of Harun al-Rashid. That munificent princess dug wells from Baghdad to Medina and built, we are told, a wall to direct pilgrims over the shifting sands. There is a fifth road, or rather mountain path, concerning which I can give no information. (Burton 1893: 2:58)*

Of the four ways enumerated by Burton, the "Sultan's Way" was doubtless the major route from Mecca to Medina and vice versa. It was traveled in the Middle Ages by two of our most detailed reporters, Ibn Jubayr in 1184 and Ibn Battuta in 1326. Although it was a strenuous trip, neither traveler suggests that it was particularly dangerous.

Ibn Jubayr had finished his Hajj and had already made arrangements to pursue his further travels to Baghdad and Mosul; hence he journeyed from Mecca to Medina with the same Iraqi caravan whose company he would subsequently share from Medina to Baghdad:

Sunday evening, April 1st (1184), we went to join company at the camp of the Iraqi amir at al-Zahir, which is about two miles from Mecca. We had just fixed the rental of our mounts as far as Mosul, which is ten days beyond Baghdad. . . . We spent three days at al-Zahir, renewing each day our concourse with the venerable House and repeating our farewells to it.

On the afternoon of the 3rd the camp was struck, slowly and gently, out of regard for slower pilgrims and the stragglers; it was moved to Marr Bottom, about eight miles from the place we had left. . . . From the day we had arrived in Mecca on the 4th of August 1183 to the day of our departure from al-Zahir, the 3rd of April 1184, our stay at Mecca had lasted eight and a third months, and, taking into account the differing number of days in the months, two hundred and forty-five happy and blessed days. . . . By God's generosity we had been deprived of seeing the Sacred House on only three days out of that number: the day of Arafat, the day of sacrifice and . . . the day of our departure for al-Zahir. May God provide in his generosity that this is not our last contact with the sacred soil.

From there we left, after the noon prayer on Thursday, for Marr Bottom, a fertile valley with many palm trees, where a flowing spring provides running water which irrigates the soil of this region. The valley embraces a wide area, with numerous villages and springs. Fruit is exported from here to Mecca. (Ibn Jubayr 1948–1949: 210/Ar. 182)

On Friday there was an unexpected delay. One of the royal personages in the caravan, the daughter of Amir Masʿud, ruler of "the passes of Cilicia, Armenia and the neighboring areas of the land of Rum," was missing from the caravan, though she had departed with it. The commander of the caravan ordered a delay until she could be found. The "gaudy princess" turned up finally on Saturday, without explanation, it appears, though speculation about where she had been, and why, was rife.

We were under way again on Saturday, April 9th (1184), and camped near Usfan, where we passed part of the night and where we made our morning prayer, at dawn on Sunday. The place is situated on a plain between two mountains with copious wells, which bear the name of the Caliph Uthman—may God be pleased with him. . . . There is an ancient fortress with strong towers, but it is unoccupied; age has left its mark on it and it has been ruined by the absence of upkeep and a progressive delapidation. We passed several miles beyond this place and then camped

at the height of the heat to rest. Soon after the noon prayer we left for Khulays, where we arrived on the evening of the same day. This place too is located on a plain with numerous palm trees. There is a sturdy fortress atop the mountain which dominates the plain, and in the plain itself another fortress, which has fallen into ruin. There is a flowing spring whose water has been diverted into underground canals. The water is taken from them through openings like well-mouths; caravans there replenish their supply of water since it is lacking along the way due to the constant dryness. The caravan passed Monday morning there, busied with the watering of the camels and providing drink for themselves.

At noon on Monday, immediately after the prayer, we left Khulays and resumed our march, which stretched out to the very last moment before the time of the night prayer. We halted and had enjoyed only a brief sleep before the drum sounded again. We broke camp and marched until afternoon of this day, when we made a rest stop until the beginning of the noon prayer of Tuesday. We left this halting-place for a valley called Wadi al-Samk ("Valley of the Abyss"), a name which seems hardly appropriate to the place. We arrived there at the very end of the time for evening prayer, and we remained there on Wednesday to replenish our water supplies: water is found there in pools or sometimes by digging in the sand.

We left at the beginning of the noon prayer of Wednesday, and during the night crossed a steep, rocky bluff, where we lost many camels; we halted in the plain, where we slept for part of the night. There followed a trek across an immense desert area extending as far as the eye could see, a stretch of sand where the camels no longer had to walk in line since the way was so broad. We made a rest halt in the middle of the day, Thursday, the 14th of April (1184); we were then two stages from Badr. In the beginning of the afternoon we resumed our march and camped for the night at a place near Badr; we were on our way again and reached Badr before the second half of the night.

Badr was not merely a stopping place. Here Muhammad won his famous victory, quite unexpectedly, over the Muslims' pagan persecutors from Mecca, as Ibn Jubayr does not fail to remark:

Badr is a large town, with palm-groves that run one into the other. There is a fortress high atop a mountain; its approach is via the bottom of a valley between the mountains. Badr has a flowing spring. The site of the pool before which took place the battle in Islam which glorified the faith and cast down the polytheists is occupied today by a palm-grove, and the place where the martyrs fell is behind it. The Mount of Mercy upon which the angels descended (Quran 3:134) is on the left as you go from Badr to al-Safra. Opposite this hill is the Mount of the Drums, which

looks like an elongated sand-dune, and it is so called because of a widely held tradition that there is heard there every Friday the sound of drums as a perpetual reminder of the Prophet's victory there. The site of the shelter in which the Prophet stayed is at the foot of this hill, and the battle-ground in front. In the palm-grove of the pool there is a mosque and what is said to be the place where the Prophet's camel knelt. One of the bedouin who live at Badr confirmed that the drums were heard on the hill, but that this took place on Mondays and Thursdays, which caused us great surprise. No one knows the truth of the matter save God Most High.

It is one march from Badr to al-Safra, and the road that leads there follows a valley between mountains, where there are continuous palm-groves and numerous springs; in all, an excellent road. At al-Safra there is a stout fortress, and nearby a number of others, particularly two called The Twins, one named "The Hassanite" and the other "The New Fort."

The month of Muharram [14 April 1184]. May God make us part of His blessing and that of His new year [580 A.H.]. The new moon appeared on Saturday night as we broke camp from Badr to al-Safra. . . . We camped again after the time of the evening prayer and so we were there Saturday morning to salute the new crescent moon. We made a rest halt so that our water could be replenished and people relax until the afternoon prayer. From there to Medina the Blessed there is, God willing, three days' journey.

We left there on Saturday afternoon, and our journey lasted until just after the time of the night prayer. We followed a way along a valley, hemmed in continuously by mountains. We camped for the night into Sunday, only to leave again in the middle of the night and continue our journey into the morning, when we paused at the "Well Marked with a Standard" to rest from the heat of the day. It is said that Ali ibn abi Talib fought the Jinn there; it is also called al-Rawha. These wells are extremely deep and it is barely possible to touch the bottom; the water comes from a spring.

We took the road again a little after the mid-afternoon prayer on Sunday and continued until the end of the time for the evening prayer, when we camped at the Pass of Ali—upon him be peace. We left there in the middle of the night, by way of Turban, for al-Bayda, from which you can see Medina the Blessed. We camped on the morning of April 16th at the Wadi Aqiq, at the side of which is located the mosque of Dhu al-Hulayfa, where the Prophet donned the ihram for pilgrimage. Medina is five miles distant, and the territory of Medina extends from Dhu al-Hulayfa to the tomb of Hamza and to Quba. What can first be seen from here is the tall white minaret of the Mosque of the Prophet.

We left immediately after the noon prayer on Monday, April 16th, and

camped outside the radiant city, the white land honored by Muhammad, the prince of Prophets. (Ibn Jubayr 1949–1951: 212–218/Ar. 184–189)

In 1326 Ibn Battuta traveled this route in the opposite direction, with a copy of Ibn Jubayr obviously near at hand.

Then came our departure from Medina to go to Mecca. We halted near the mosque of Dhu al-Hulayfa, where the Apostle of God—God bless him and give him peace—assumed the pilgrim garb. It is at a distance of five miles from Medina, of whose sacred territory it forms the limit, and not far from it is the Wadi al-Aqiq. Here I divested myself of my tailored clothes, bathed, put on the garment of my consecration and made a prayer of two bowings. I entered the pilgrim state under obligation to carry out the rites of the Greater Pilgrimage [the Hajj] without conjunction.

"Without conjunction": that is, without combining the Hajj with the Umra. The practical effect of this limited intention is that if he later decided to perform the Umra, Ibn Battuta would have to go out to one of the stations marking the boundary of Mecca's sacred territory and declare a new intention of making the Umra.

In my enthusiasm I did not cease crying Labbayka Allahumma *through every valley and hill and rise and descent until I came to the Pass of Ali—upon him be peace—where I halted that night. We set out from there and encamped at al-Rawha, where there is a well known as Bir Dhat al-Alam ("the Well Marked with a Standard," also known as "the Wells of Ali"), and it is said that Ali—upon him be peace—fought with the* jinn *at this well. Then we continued our march and encamped at al-Safra, which is a cultivated and inhabited valley in which there is water, palm gardens, buildings, and a fortified grange, occupied by the Hassani Sharifs and others. There is a large fort in this place also, and in the neighborhood are a number of forts and contiguous villages. (Ibn Battuta 1958: 184–185)*

We continued our journey from this place and encamped at Badr . . .

Here there is no pretense: Ibn Battuta simply copies word for word Ibn Jubayr's notes on the historical topography of Badr. Ibn Battuta then resumes in his own voice:

We went from Badr into the desert known as the Flat of Bazwa, which is a wilderness where the guide wanders from the way, and friend has no thought to spare for friend—a three nights' journey. At the end of this march is the vale of Rabigh, in which pools are formed by rain and hold the water for a long time. From this point, which is just before al-Juhfa, the pilgrims (coming southward along the coastal road) from Egypt and the Maghrib enter the pilgrim state.

We set out from Rabigh and marched for a space of three days to Khulays. We passed through the defile of al-Sawiq, which is situated at a distance of half a day's journey from Khulays, and a very sandy place. The pilgrims make it a point of supping a certain barley gruel there and bring it with them from Egypt and Syria for this purpose; they serve it out to people mixed with sugar, and the amirs fill the watering tanks with it and serve the people from them. It is related that when the Apostle of God (God bless him and give him peace) passed through this place his Companions had no food with them, so he taking some of its sand gave it to them and they supped it (and found it to be) this barley gruel.

We then camped at the pool of Khulays, which lies in an open plain and has many palm groves. It possesses a strongly built fort on the top of a hill, and on the plain there is another fort in ruins. There is a gushing spring at this place, for whose waters channels have been made in the ground so that they flow to the cultivated lands. The lord of Khulays is a Sharif of the Hassani line. The bedouin of that neighborhood hold a great market there, to which they bring sheep, fruits and condiments.

We marched next to Usfan, in an open plain between hills, where there are wells of spring water, one of which is attributed to Uthman ibn Affan—may God be pleased with him. The laddered way, which is likewise attributed to Uthman, is half a day's journey from Khulays; it is a narrow pass between two hills, and at one part of it there is a pavement in the shape of steps, and traces of old buildings. . . . We then marched to Usfan [or Asfan] and encamped in the Bottom of Marr, also called Marr al-Zuhran [and later, and presently, called Wadi Fatima], a fertile valley with numerous date palms and a gushing spring of flowing water which serves for the irrigation of that district. From this valley fruit and vegetables are brought to Mecca, may God Most High ennoble her. We set out again at dawn from this blessed valley, with hearts full of gladness at reaching the goal of our hopes, rejoicing in our present condition and future state, and arriving in the morning at the City of Surety, Mecca, may God Most High ennoble her. (Ibn Battuta 1958: 186–187)

The Last Stage: From Jidda to Mecca

For most pilgrims, the journey from the sea to inland Arabia began at Jidda, the port of Mecca and a city that never failed to make an impression, though only rarely a favorable one. Ibn Jubayr's is one of the earliest pilgrim appreciations of Jidda, and a relatively neutral one at that, though it will be recalled that he arrived there from Aydhab on the Egyptian shore, a town the usually imperturbable Ibn Jubayr found truly trying.

The city of Jidda is situated on the shore of the sea; its houses are for the most part mud bungalows. There are some inns there built of stone

and clay, at the top of which there are some rooms of mud, like the ones we call ghorfa. *These inns have roofs where one seeks rest at night due to the great heat. There are visible in this city ancient ruins that demonstrate that this was once a considerable city. There are traces of its ancient walls that still exist today. There is a place there with an old and lofty domed shrine* (qubba); *it is said that this was the resting place of Eve, mother of the human race, when she came to Mecca, and that they built this edifice to testify to the bestowed blessing and the merit of this place.*[37] *God knows best about all that.*

The inhabitants of this city, which is close to both mountain and desert, are for the most part descendants of the Prophet, Alids, Husaynids, Hasanids, Jaʿfarids—may God be pleased with their noble ancestor. They are in a state wretched enough to wring pity from the stones. They are engaged in all the lower occupations: renting camels, if they have any, selling milk or water or other goods, like the dates they garner here and there, or the wood they go out and gather. At times it is their women, themselves sharifas *[Meccan aristocracy], who do this work.*

Outside the city some old water installations bear witness to the antiquity of its foundation. It is said that this was a Persian city. It has cisterns hollowed out of the hard rock; these are many in number and are joined one to the other: they maintain that there are 360 cisterns outside the city and the same number inside. We saw with our own eyes a great number of them, without being able to determine exactly how many of them there are. (Ibn Jubayr 1949–1951: 85–87/Ar. 75–76)

The road between Jidda and Mecca was by all accounts the best known and best serviced of all the caravan routes within the Hijaz, as British Intelligence attested early in the twentieth century:

We have ample detail about the Jidda-Mecca road. It is the most traveled track in Arabia, protected by blockhouses at intervals, and well supplied by halt stations. The first few miles lie over sandy plain, after which the track passes through a range of low hills to the plain of Bahra. Thence it leads over dusty undulating country to the main ridge of Western Arabia, in a foothill valley of which, running north-east from the range, lies the Holy City at a mean altitude of no more than 700 feet. . . . Mecca donkeys are the best riding animals for this road, and very good animals can do the journey in six or seven hours. The track is unmade, unmetalled and unbanked; but it has been trodden to a very fair surface, and is not interrupted by natural obstacles. A motor car could probably pass over it all. . . . Guns have often been wheeled over it. (Hogarth 1917: 86)

Hogarth's was not the first time-distance estimate of this well-traveled route. Burckhardt, for example, offered this guess in 1814:

I traveled several times afterwards between Mecca and Jidda, in both directions. The caravan's rate of march is here very slow, scarcely exceeding two miles an hour. I have ridden from Mecca to Jidda on an ass in thirteen hours. The distance may be fairly estimated at . . . about fifty-five miles. (Burckhardt 1829: 58)

The Iranian pilgrim Farahani, whom we shall meet again, was far more exact in 1885:

It is twelve farsakhs from Jidda to Mecca. (The rate per) farsakh, insofar as I have been able to determine it with a watch, is this: One who travels mounted on horseback goes one farsakh per hour. Mules or pack horses . . . an hour and a half. A file of camels . . . an hour and forty-five minutes. Thus one reaches Mecca from Jidda in twelve hours if one goes mounted on ambling-paced pack horses or donkeys. It takes from sixteen to eighteen hours if one goes by pack-mule and litter. If one goes by litter and camel-train, it is a twenty-one-hour trip without stopping. (Farahani 1990: 205)

Speed often depends on motive, and we have an account of what must have been one of the fastest recorded transits—traditional style—of those fifty-five-odd miles. Leon Roches, on a secret mission for the French government, stood in his Muslim garb among the throng of pilgrims at Arafat in 1841. Suddenly a cry went up: "Yo, a Christian! Seize the Christian, the infidel son of an infidel!" Quickly Roches was indeed seized by a pair of strong arms, trussed, gagged, and thrown across a saddle horse, head down on one side, feet dangling on the other. He could see nothing. An hour later the gag was removed and he was held seated upright in the saddle as the Sharif's men escorted him to safety in Jidda. And, says Roches, with some satisfaction:

It took those cavalrymen roughly six hours to cover the seventy-six kilometers, seventy-six, *that separate Jidda from Mecca. (Roches 1904: 342)*

Roches probably did not miss a great deal inside his bag. The road was not very interesting, though it did have its pleasant traditions, as discovered by the Dutchman Snouck Hurgronje, a temporary resident of Mecca at the end of the nineteenth century and a careful observer of the city's mores.

The custom of stone throwing has of old maintained itself outside the Mina Valley, where Islam has legalized the throwing on to three stone heaps. The tomb of Abu Lahab is (likewise) still to the present day stoned. On the Jidda-Mecca road between Jidda and Bahra there are two stone heaps to which the passer-by of the lower class always contributes his

stone. The legend is that a pastrycook in Mecca asserted that he could by fast running take a plate of fresh baked cakes hot to Jidda, but forgot to add the reservation "God willing." So when he arrived at that spot he was struck dead as a punishment. The other heap is explained by a similar legend of a pastrycook running from Jidda toward Mecca with a plate of tarts. Whence the two heaps are called "The Cakes" and "The Tarts." (Hurgronje 1931: 96)