

### **The Muslim pilgrimage**

The *hajj* to Mecca and its surrounding area is an annual ritual lasting up to seven days which contains within it a fully detailed sequence of events enjoined upon all those who are physically able to come to the city. Performed during the first half of the last month of the year, Dhū'l-Ḥijja, the *hajj* requires a state of ritual sanctity for the activities. Prior to the *hajj* itself, ritual purification is undertaken, and the Ka'ba is circumambulated and a run is performed between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, two hillocks near the Ka'ba (now joined to the central Meccan mosque by a covered arcade); both activities are performed seven times, interspersed with prayers and invocations. On the seventh of Dhū'l-Ḥijja, the pilgrims participate in a prayer service at the mosque around the Ka'ba. On the following morning, the pilgrimage itself starts and, over the next three days, the following activities take place. The pilgrims assemble in Minā, just outside Mecca, and stay there for the night. The next morning, they depart for the plain of 'Arafāt, 15 kilometres east, and assemble on and around the Mount of Mercy where a prayer ritual is performed and a ceremony entitled the "standing" is undertaken, lasting from the time the sun passes the meridian until sunset. That evening, the pilgrims return to Muzdalifa, about halfway back to Minā, where the night is spent. The next day, a journey to Minā brings them to the stone pillar (*al-jamrat al-'aqaba*) at which seven pebbles are thrown; the column is said to represent

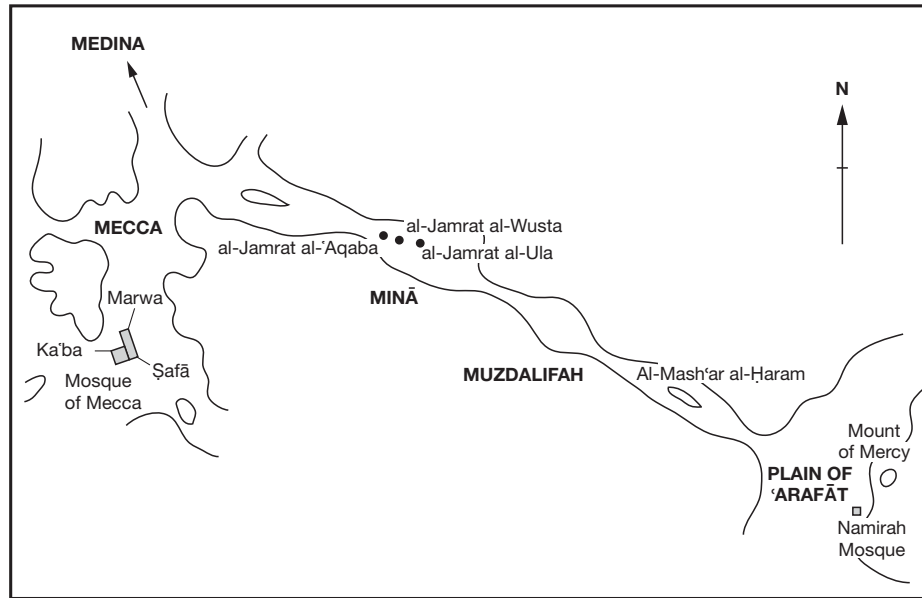


Figure 7.1 Map of the pilgrimage

Satan. This is followed by a ritual slaughter of sheep, goats and camels, and a meal, the *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, “the festival of the sacrifice” (performed by all Muslims whether in Mecca or not and seen as the second major festival of Islam). Returning to Mecca, the Kaʿba is circumambulated and the running between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa (unless completed prior to the *ḥajj* itself) is performed. The state of ritual purity is also abandoned on this day, symbolized by men having their heads shaved and women having a lock of hair cut off. Three days of celebration at Minā generally follow for most pilgrims, with more stones thrown at the three pillars of Satan, all followed by another circumambulation of the Kaʿba. A visit to Medina will also often be included before the pilgrims return to their own homes.<sup>17</sup>

The Qurʾān’s major testimony to this ritual is found in *sūra* 2, verses 196–200 and *sūra* 5, verses 95–7. Various parts of the ritual are detailed, as are some of the legal regulations which bear on the participants. However, no full and cohesive explanation is given. An element which does receive mention on a number of occasions is the relationship of some elements of the pilgrimage to the activities of Abraham and Ishmael. The Qurʾān states in *sūra* 2, verse 127 that “Abraham and Ishmael laid the foundations for the House [understood to be the Kaʿba]” and that they did a number of the activities which the later pilgrims also do: performed the circumambulation,

ran between al-Şafā and al-Marwa, sacrificed a sheep, and stoned Satan.

Historically, the pilgrimage has given tremendous prominence to Mecca but, as has already been mentioned in Chapter 4 above, there was a time when Jerusalem may well have been an alternative pilgrimage destination, although clearly the Dome of the Rock was not constructed with a view to facilitating the vast number of pilgrims which are received at Mecca each year. Notably, the inscriptions in the Dome do not exhort people to perform a pilgrimage; the inscriptions are perhaps there, however, to be read while performing a circumambulatory ritual within the domed area.