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Classroom Resources

World Views: Maps in Art

Manuscript of the Dala'il al-Khayrat (Guides to Good Things) by al-Jazuli, A.D. 1787/A.H. 1201



Hafiz Faydullah, known as Hakkakzade (Turkey)
Manuscript of the Dala'il al-Khayrat (Guides to Good Things) by al-Jazuli, A.D. 1787/A.H. 1201
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 7 5/8 X 5 7/8 in.
LACMA, The Edward Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art
at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.85.237.54
Photo © 2002 Museum Associates/LACMA

Getting to Mecca

This is a map of Mecca, the most important holy city in the religion of Islam. Islam was founded under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632), who was born in Mecca, in western Arabia. One of the five religious duties incumbent upon all Muslims (practitioners of Islam) is, if at all possible, to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. This map of Mecca is from a book called the *Guides to Good Things*.

Written by al-Jazuli, the *Guides to Good Things* included prayers and maps for Turkish worshipers to use when they traveled to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Each copy of the *Guides* was made by hand: A calligrapher copied the text, and illuminators, or illustrators, drew the illustrations, maps, and the decorations. Guidebooks like this one were popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

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Things to Notice

Look for the square black-and-brown structure in the center of the map. This is the Kacba, a cube-shaped structure with a large black stone set into one of its walls that is the holiest site in the Islamic world. Muslims who make the pilgrimage to Mecca perform ritual prayers while walking around the Kacba in a circle. The Kacba is located in the center of a large, white rectangular courtyard, within the Great Mosque.

If you look closely at the rows of arches and columns along the walls that surround the courtyard, you'll notice that the artist included details like the black-and-white stones of the arches and the lamps that hang between the pillars. A number of buildings and sites outside the walls of the courtyard, including the minarets, or towers, are labeled.

- Notice which locations on the map are labeled (with text written in calligraphic script). Why do you think those locations were labeled?
- Find a recent photograph of Mecca. What features can you identify in the photograph that are also on the map? Can you locate the Kacba?

Easy to Use

This map focuses on the location of the Kacba and other locations that a pilgrim making the trip to Mecca would find most useful. The map does not show any people or houses. It also leaves off many other buildings and natural features. Like most maps, this one offers a simplified representation of an area. Because it is not cluttered with details, the relevant features are clear and easy to locate.

The map includes a simplified view of the hills. They serve a practical function (they help the user determine the orientation of the map) but they also convey a sense of the distant landscape that surrounds the city. The limited palette of colors, few details, and simplified shapes make it easy to find the information that is most important. Repeating patterns and limiting the number of colors also unify the image visually.

Notice that the buildings are pictured from a variety of different angles. One building appears upside-down. The map shows the perspective from each building if you were standing in front of it, heading towards the Kacba. Why might it have been helpful to show that perspective for each of the buildings?

- This map of Mecca is both practical and a work of art. Find several different maps of the area where you live. In what ways are they different? Which map is the most beautiful? Which is most practical? Which would you give to a friend from out of town trying to locate where you are?
- Draw a map that shows how to get to one of your favorite places, or a route you often walk. What do you consider to be important landmarks to highlight? What details will you omit?

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