MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

AnIsl 60 (2026), p. 115-128

Luca Patrizi

The Relics of the Kaʿba and Their Ritual Use Through Islamic Historiographical and Exegetical Sources

Conditions d'utilisation

L'utilisation du contenu de ce site est limitée à un usage personnel et non commercial. Toute autre utilisation du site et de son contenu est soumise à une autorisation préalable de l'éditeur (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). Le copyright est conservé par l'éditeur (Ifao).

Conditions of Use

You may use content in this website only for your personal, noncommercial use. Any further use of this website and its content is forbidden, unless you have obtained prior permission from the publisher (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). The copyright is retained by the publisher (Ifao).

Dernières publications

9782724711264	*La chapelle d'Osiris Ounnefer Neb-djefaou*	Laurent Coulon
9782724711752	*Guide du Caire Islamique*	Hadrien Collet
9782724711660	*Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales 41*	Adrien Candiard (éd.)
9782724711745	*Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger (BAEFE)*	
9782724711271	*Du côté de chez Zeus*	Emmanuel Botte (éd.), Hélène Cuvigny (éd.), Michel Reddé (éd.)
9782724711677	*La Description de l'Égypte*	Paul-Marie Grinevald
9782724711714	*La pensée et la pratique pharmacologiques d'Avicenne*	Sylvie Ayari
9782724711899	*BCAI 40*	

© Institut français d'archéologie orientale - Le Caire

LUCA PATRIZI*

The Relics of the Kaʿba and Their Ritual Use Through Islamic Historiographical and Exegetical Sources

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relics associated with the Kaʿba, examining their significance in both pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts to determine any continuity and change in their veneration. Both relics of supernatural origin (*acheiropoieta*), such as the Black Stone and the Station of Abraham, and contact relics (*brandea*), including the door of the Kaʿba and its ritual covering (*kiswa*), are taken into consideration. Through the analysis of Islamic historiographic and exegetical sources, the article highlights the ritual practices associated with these relics, also addressing the tensions between traditional veneration and reformist movements, particularly Wahhabi and Salafi criticisms, which have restricted access to some relics. The relics of the Kaʿba prove in conclusion to be dynamic elements of the Islamic faith, embodying sacred history, continuity with the Abrahamic traditions, and the living spirituality of believers.

Keywords: relics in Islam, Kaʿba, Black Stone, Station of Abraham, *ḥiǧr Ismāʿīl*, relics of the Kaʿba

* Luca Patrizi, University of Turin, luca.patrizi@unito.it

AnIsl 60 (2026), p. 115-128
The Relics of the Kaʿba and Their Ritual Use Through Islamic Historiographical and Exegetical Sources
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

✦ **RÉSUMÉ**

Les reliques de la Kaʿba et leur usage rituel à travers les sources historiographiques et exégétiques islamiques

Cet article étudie les reliques associées à la Kaʿba en examinant leur signification dans les contextes préislamique et islamique afin de déterminer la continuité et le changement dans leur vénération. Les reliques d'origine surnaturelle (*acheiropoieta*), telles que la Pierre noire et la station d'Abraham, et les reliques de contact (*brandea*), y compris les portes de la Kaʿba et sa couverture rituelle (*kiswa*), sont prises en considération. À travers l'analyse des sources historiographiques et exégétiques islamiques, cet article met en lumière les pratiques rituelles associées à ces reliques et aborde également les tensions entre les partisans de la vénération traditionnelle et les réformistes, en particulier les critiques wahhabites et salafistes, qui ont restreint l'accès à certaines reliques. Les reliques de la Kaʿba se révèlent être des éléments dynamiques de la foi islamique, qui incarnent l'histoire sacrée, la continuité avec les traditions abrahamiques et la spiritualité vivante des croyants.

Mots-clés : reliques en islam, Kaʿba, Pierre noire, station d'Abraham, *ḥiǧr Ismāʿīl*, reliques de la Kaʿba

✦ **ملخص**

الآثار المتعلقة بالكعبة واستخدامها في الطقوس الدينية من خلال المصادر التاريخية والتفسيرية الإسلامية

يتناول هذا المقال دراسة الآثار المرتبطة بالكعبة من خلال فحص دلالاتها في السياقين ما قبل الإسلامي والإسلامي، بهدف تحديد مظاهر الاستمرارية والتغير في ممارسات تقديسها. ويأخذ المقال بعين الاعتبار الآثار الإعجازية أي غير المصنوعة باليد (*acheiropoieta*)، مثل الحجر الأسود ومقام إبراهيم، إلى جانب الآثار التي اكتسبت قداستها عن طريق التلامس (*brandea*)، بما في ذلك أبواب الكعبة وكِسوتها. ومن خلال تحليل المصادر التاريخية والتفسيرية الإسلامية، يسلّط هذا المقال الضوء على الممارسات الطقسية المرتبطة بهذه الآثار، كما يتناول التوترات القائمة بين أنصار التبجيل التقليدي والإصلاحيين، ولا سيّما الانتقادات الوهابية والسلفية التي أسفرت عن تقييد الوصول إلى بعض هذه الآثار. وتكشف آثار الكعبة عن كونها عناصر ديناميكية في العقيدة الإسلامية، إذ تجسّد التاريخ المقدّس، والاستمرارية مع التقاليد الإبراهيمية، والروحانية الحيّة لدى المؤمنين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: آثار في الإسلام، الكعبة، الحجر الأسود، مقام إبراهيم، حِجْر إسماعيل، آثار الكعبة

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine the relics associated with the Kaʿba and to explore their significance in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, with the aim of determining whether there is continuity between the two periods in terms of veneration and significance. In doing so, I intend to provide insight into the ways in which these relics were venerated, while also drawing attention to some interesting practices documented in Islamic historiography. As we shall see, the relics associated with the Kaʿba fall into three main categories. The first is that of relics considered to be of non-human origin, which we can define with a term initially used by art historians as *acheiropoieta*.[1] These objects, such as the Black Stone (*al-ḥaǧar al-aswad*) or the Station of Abraham (*maqām Ibrāhīm*), are venerated not for their earthly history but for their divine or miraculous origin. The second category of ancient legendary remains are the burial sites of ancient prophets that would be located, as we shall see, near the Kaʿba. Finally, the last category is that of relics considered as earthly objects imbued with holiness through their contact with the divine or sacred objects. Again, we can use a category borrowed from historians of Christianity, who call them "contact relics" or *brandea*.[2] These objects include, for example, the door of the Kaʿba and the *kiswa*, its ritual cover.

By investigating the nature and function of the relics associated to the Kaʿba in their historical and devotional context, I will delve into the complex relationship between material objects, sacred history, and religious practice, exploring how these relics continue to hold profound symbolic significance for believers to this day.

2. Relics of supernatural origin (*acheiropoieta*)

2.1. *The Black Stone and the Station of Abraham*

The practice of venerating relics dates back to pre-Islamic times, and its roots can be found in the primary sources of Islam, the Quran and Hadiths. Interestingly, despite the central role it plays in the context of the pilgrimage to Mecca, which stems from the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad as reflected in the Hadiths, the Black Stone is not mentioned in the Quran. We find instead the following verse, that clearly legitimises the ritual role of the Station of Abraham: "Take Abraham's station as a place for prayer for yourselves."[3] This "station" is commonly identified by Islamic scholars with the ancient footprint believed to have belonged to the prophet Abraham, still preserved in Mecca near the Kaʿba.[4] This footprint,

1. Belting 1994, p. 49.
2. Freeman 2001, p. 30.
3. Quran, II, 125.
4. Kister 1971.

AnIsl 60 (2026), p. 115-128
The Relics of the Kaʿba and Their Ritual Use Through Islamic Historiographical and Exegetical Sources
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

with its iconic two-foot shape, was already present and probably venerated near the Kaʿba in pre-Islamic times, as some verses in a poem attributed to Abū Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the Prophet's uncle, seems to indicate:

وبالحجر المسودّ إذ يمسحونه
إذا اكتنفوه بالضحى والأصائل
وموطئ إبراهيم في الصخر رطبة
على قدميه حافياً غيرَ ناعل

And by the Black *[blackened]* Stone when they touch it
when they encircle it in the morning and evening light
and the imprint of Abraham in the moist stone
on his feet, barefoot, with no sandals.[5]

With the arrival of Islam, the veneration of the *maqām* was legitimised by the verse of the Quran mentioned above and the endorsement of the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Over time, this footprint served as a prototype for other relics, including footprints attributed to the Prophet, which took on similar characteristics and sacred functions.[6]

In al-Azraqī's (d. 249/864) *History of Mecca*, we find the following tradition attributed to the Prophet's renowned companion Ibn ʿAbbās: "The only things on earth that come from Paradise are the Black Stone and the Station of Abraham, they are two precious stones of Paradise, and if they had not been touched by the associators *[ahl al-širk]*, any infirm person who had touched it would have been cured."[7] Both relics are described in Islamic historiographical sources as originally radiant, although they lost their lustre after contact with humans. The blackening of this relic is attributed to pre-Islamic rituals in which the walls of the Kaʿba and its sacred stones were sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices.[8]

Al-Azraqī also adds that the Black Stone bore an ancient inscription in Syriac, and only a Jewish scholar was able to decipher it.[9] Similarly, the Station of Abraham would also feature an ancient inscription. The historian al-Fākihī (d. 272–279/885–892) claimed to have personally seen this inscription, which he described as being in Hebrew or Himyarite, containing the phrase *aṣbāut adonāī*.[10] This formula, a typical Semitic invocation to God, bears similarities to the *glossolalia formulae* found in magical or protective texts. These inscriptions on sacred stones remind us of the case of the Lapis Niger, the "Black Stone" in the centre of the ancient

5. Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, I, p. 306.
6. Patrizi 2023.
7. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, p. 443.
8. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 444–445; al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka*, I, p. 89.
9. Rubin 1986, p. 120.
10. Kister 1971, p. 486.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Roman Forum in Rome. On this stone is engraved, among other words, the word "*sakros*", from which the word "sacred" is derived in Neo-Latin and western languages.[11]

The Station of Abraham would also seem to exercise an intercessory function. Al-Fākihī reports that the Prophet and his companions prayed before it, asking for God's forgiveness.[12] This confers on the relic a role of spiritual mediation. Moreover, the act of touching and kissing the *maqām*, although disputed by some scholars, is a common practice among Muslim believers to this day. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) maintained that only those acts of worship clearly prescribed by the Prophet Muḥammad should be followed, particularly with regard to specific holy sites. He held that while it is permissible to revere the Station of Abraham, touching and kissing it falls outside the Prophet's established practices.[13] Following Ibn Taymiyya's footsteps, contemporary Wahhabi and Salafi scholars recommend that pilgrims confine themselves to prayer behind the *maqām*, as mentioned in the verse already quoted, rather than engaging in any physical veneration of it.

Al-Fākihī also recounts a fascinating episode involving the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785). During his pilgrimage to Mecca, while the Great Mosque was being restored, the Station of Abraham was brought to him. The caliph honoured the relic by touching it and pouring Zamzam water on it, which he then drank. The water was even stored in bottles, a practice that reflects the widespread Muslim custom of *tabarruk* or seeking blessings through contact with sacred objects.[14] This ritual was not exclusive to al-Mahdī, as the pouring of Zamzam water over relics is attested in several testimonies. Al-Fākihī himself witnessed a similar episode, when the governor of Mecca in his time, during one of the *maqām*'s restorations, poured Zamzam water over it and stored the blessed water in bottles for future use.[15]

In contemporary times, the Station of Abraham is kept inside a protective structure, probably both to safeguard it and to avoid physical contact, given Wahhabi scholars' opposition to relic veneration practices.[16] This opposition also extends to the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina, which was also made inaccessible by the establishment of the modern Saudi state.[17]

2.2. *The ram's horns*

Another interesting relic associated with the Kaʿba and with the prophet Abraham in particular is a pair of ram's horns of supernatural origin. When Muslims conquered Mecca, Muḥammad ordered the destruction of the statues and all pre-Islamic cultic materials found around and inside the Kaʿba. According to Islamic sources reported by al-Azraqī, a pair of

11. Dumézil 1958.
12. Kister 1971, pp. 482–483.
13. Ibn Taymiyya, *Manāsik al-ḥaǧǧ*, p. 72.
14. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 524–543; al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka*, I, p. 475.
15. Al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka*, I, p. 479.
16. See https://madainproject.com/station_of_abraham.
17. Kellner 2024.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

ram's horns was found inside the Kaʿba, in addition to an icon of the Virgin and Child that he protected from destruction. Al-Azraqī also relates the legend about this relic. When Abraham was preparing to sacrifice the ram that had miraculously descended in substitution for his son, a fire descended from heaven and consumed the entire ram except for its head. The Prophet Muḥammad therefore left the ram's horns in the Kaʿba and instructed that they should be covered with a cloth to prevent them from distracting the attention of those who prayed there. When during the conflict between the Umayyads and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (d. 73/692) the Kaʿba was burnt down, the anti-caliph decided to rebuild it. During the demolition, the horns of Abraham's ram were found hanging on the wall, with a layer of paint on them, but when someone touched them, they shattered. Interestingly, the so-called "Abraham's foundations" (*qawāʿid Ibrāhīm*) were also found, ancient stones that showed bystanders their sacredness through some miracles.[18]

In this context, the ram's horns, like other relics associated with Abraham, can have a twofold significance. On the one hand, they represent continuity with the Abrahamic tradition, preserving the memory of a crucial moment of divine intervention in the life of a prophet revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. On the other hand, their preservation within the Kaʿba emphasises the transition from pre-Islamic religious practices to the monotheism of Islam, with the Prophet Muḥammad acting as the preserver of this legacy while simultaneously shaping a new religious order.

The Black Stone, the Station of Abraham, and the legendary horns of Abraham's ram, due to their characteristics, therefore fall into the above category of relics of non-human, supernatural origin (*acheiropoieta*) associated with the Kaʿba.

3. Ancient burials of prophets: The *ḥiǧr Ismāʿīl*

According to some Islamic traditions, this semicircular space adjacent to the Kaʿba (*ḥiǧr*) is believed to be the burial place of the mortal remains of the prophet Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, precisely between the Gutter of Mercy (*mīzāb al-raḥma*) and the western stone gate of the Kaʿba.[19] However, according to some modern scholars, the exact location of the place now called *ḥiǧr* has shifted from pre-Islamic to Islamic times, as it was most likely near the location of the Zamzam well. For this reason, the tombs should rather be situated in the latter location.[20] In other traditions, it is said that the final resting place of a large number of prophets—some accounts suggest up to seventy or even three hundred—including Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Šuʿayb, is between the Black Stone, the *maqām Ibrāhīm*, and the Zamzam well.[21] These various claims emphasise the long-standing association of the *ḥiǧr* with prophetic figures and its sacred status.

18. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 322–323; Shalem 2005, pp. 274–275.
19. Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, I, p. 20; al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 39, 219–202.
20. Rubin 1986.
21. Rubin 1986, p. 111.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Adherents of modern and contemporary Islamic reform movements propose alternative interpretations. According to the Salafi scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999), there is not a single authentic tradition from the main collections mentioning that the tomb of Hagar and Ishmael is located near the Kaʿba. The *ḥiǧr* would only be the place where Abraham built a shelter for Hagar and Ishmael.[22] This interpretation is part of the reformist approach that vehemently opposes the preservation and construction of Islamic places of worship annexed to tombs.[23]

The *ḥiǧr Ismāʿīl* also has a rich history in pre-Islamic ritual practice. Ancient sources suggest that the area had a practical purpose in relation to animal sacrifices, a deeply rooted religious practice in pre-Islamic Arabia. Animals set aside for sacrifice were kept within the *ḥiǧr* and then slaughtered near the Zamzam well, and this connection is reinforced by the very meaning of the word *ḥiǧr*, which carries multiple layers of significance. The root of the term indicates a protected or forbidden space, something sacred and at the same time restricted. Interestingly, the term can also refer to a stone, perhaps alluding to both a physical boundary and a symbolic sacredness.[24] Another term used to describe this area is *ḥaṭīm*, which conveys the sense of a closed, circular space. The dual meanings attributed to these terms reflect the multifaceted nature of the *ḥiǧr*, which served as a space for rituals, burials, and perhaps as a symbolic enclosure.[25] These meanings give the *ḥiǧr* a historical and spiritual significance that has evolved over time, intersecting with various religious traditions.

In addition to its function as a sacrificial area, the *ḥiǧr Ismāʿīl* has been associated to visions and mystical experiences. One famous account concerns ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, grandfather of the Prophet Muḥammad, who is said to have received a vision in the *ḥiǧr* that guided him to the location of the Zamzam well. While digging he found precious treasures, including a golden gazelle and swords, which may have been votive offerings.[26] This episode has led some contemporary scholars to speculate that the *ḥiǧr* was not only a place of rituals but also a burial place for individuals of religious, political, or military importance.[27] The historical role of the Kaʿba as a repository for precious objects, brought by pilgrims from distant lands, supports this theory. Sacred objects, such as the horns of Abraham's sacrificial ram, were sometimes hung on the internal walls of the Kaʿba, as we have seen, and it is possible that the *ḥiǧr* performed a similar function in storing objects of spiritual or ceremonial importance. In pre-Islamic times, pilgrims would hang these offerings on the external walls of the Kaʿba as a testimony to their devotion, enhancing the sacred aura of the area.[28]

Another emblematic tale that connects the *ḥiǧr* to visions and mystical experiences is that of the night journey and ascension (*al-isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāǧ*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, which

22. Al-Albānī, *al-Taḥḍīr*, pp. 74–78.
23. Beránek, Ťupek 2018.
24. Rubin 1986, pp. 105–107.
25. Rubin 1986, pp. 113–115.
26. Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, I, pp. 63–164.
27. Rubin 1986, pp. 115–118.
28. Rubin 1986, pp. 117–118.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

took place precisely while he was sleeping in the *ḥiǧr*.[29] Moreover, on his return to Mecca, when the Quraysh accused him of inventing the story of the night journey and ascension, God made Jerusalem appear in vision before his eyes just as it was in the *ḥiǧr*. In this way he was able to provide proof of his claims by describing the holy city in detail.[30]

Another fascinating aspect of the *ḥiǧr* is its connection with idolatry in pre-Islamic times. Many of the idols worshipped in the pre-Islamic period were housed in or near the *ḥiǧr*, making this space an important centre for religious practices that would later be replaced by the monotheism of Islam.[31]

4. Other relics of the Kaʿba

4.1. *The Yemeni corner* (al-rukn al-yamānī)

Some areas of the Kaʿba, without holding the importance of the Black Stone, are also revered by believers during ritual pilgrimage (*ḥaǧǧ*) and ordinary visitation (*ʿumra*). One of these is the Yemenite corner or pillar (*al-rukn al-yamānī*). The name probably derives from its approximate orientation towards Yemen or toward south-west (*yamān*). This place holds particular significance in Islamic tradition due to its connection with the early construction of the Kaʿba, and it contains fragments of ancient stones that have been bonded together with building materials, at least since the reconstruction by ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, mentioned above. According to some Hadiths, touching the Yemeni corner while making supplications is considered a blessed act, with the promise of forgiveness of sins for the believer.[32]

4.2. *The door of the Kaʿba*

The door of the Kaʿba also has a deep meaning for pilgrims, many of whom try to touch it or cling to it during their rituals, as it is particularly associated with divine mercy. Raised above ground level to protect it from the seasonal floods that historically plagued Mecca, this gate is therefore commonly referred to as the "Gate of Mercy" (*bāb al-raḥma*). Over the centuries, it has been rebuilt and renovated multiple times, reflecting the care and reverence that surround it. The oldest surviving door, dating back to 1039/1630, remains preserved as a historical relic, while the current door, installed in 1979, is made entirely of gold, symbolising its sacredness.[33] Inside the Kaʿba, another door, called the "Door of Repentance" (*bāb al-tawba*), leads to the staircase enabling access to the roof. Also in this case, some of the doors that have been replaced over the centuries have been preserved to the present day.[34] In addition to its architectural

29. Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, II, p. 48.
30. Al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI, p. 214.
31. Rubin 1986, p. 104.
32. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 136–143.
33. See https://madainproject.com/door_of_the_kabah.
34. Aydın 2004, pp. 164–165.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

and spiritual significance, the door of the Kaʿba is also considered a contact relic, as it derives its derive their sacredness from contact with the Kaʿba.

Ancient doors, along with old locks and keys used to secure the Kaʿba, are cherished for their historical and religious importance.[35] Similarly, the metal rings that encircle the Black Stone have been replaced several times throughout history, as they wear down due to the constant touch of millions of pilgrims. These worn rings, once discarded, are also considered relics as they have absorbed the devotion and physical contact of generations of worshippers. Some ancient specimens are preserved in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, together with relics attributed to the Prophet.[36] All these rituals highlight the symbolic importance of physical interaction with sacred objects in Islamic spirituality. The act of touching the different parts of the Kaʿba can be seen as a physical manifestation of the desire for proximity to the divine, reinforcing the idea that faith is not only an internal act of devotion but also one that involves bodily engagement.

4.3. *The* multazam

The *multazam*, the space between the Black Stone and the Kaʿba's door, holds an equally sacred status in Islamic devotion and practice. This area is also considered a particularly effective place for prayers and supplications. A specific devotional act, known as *iltizām*, involves a pilgrim pressing his body—cheek, chest, and hands—against this area while reciting invocations.[37] The *multazam* thus represents the precise area where believers can come into direct and material contact with the Kaʿba, supporting the idea that it is perceived by Muslims as a sacred relic in itself or even more as a living entity that can be embraced and kissed in a moment of intimate communion between the believer and the divine.

4.4. *The Gutter of Mercy* (mīzāb al-raḥma)

The Gutter of Mercy (*mīzāb al-raḥma*) is installed on the roof of the Kaʿba to channel rainwater away from the structure. This feature has been present since pre-Islamic times, likely as a response to the frequent floods that affected Mecca. The water from the *mīzāb* flows directly from the roof of the Kaʿba, and according to some ancient accounts, it pours onto the ground where Ishmael's tomb is believed to be located.[38] Like other objects related to the Kaʿba, earlier models of the *mīzāb* have also been preserved as contact relics, particularly from the Ottoman era. Important specimens of these relics are preserved in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, where they serve at the same time as historical and spiritual artefacts.[39] One of the

35. Sourdel-Thomine 1971.
36. Aydın 2004, pp. 162–163.
37. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 160–178.
38. Ibn Ǧubayr, *Travels*, p. 103.
39. Aydın 2004, pp. 166–169.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

most notable historical references to the *mīzāb* comes from Ibn Ǧubayr (d. 614/1217), a medieval Muslim traveller and geographer who described witnessing an interesting devotional practice. On a rainy day, pilgrims would undress and gather beneath the stream of water flowing from the *mīzāb*. This act was seen as a form of deep spiritual cleansing. The pilgrims would weep and, in a touching gesture, take the water they collected under the *mīzāb* back to their families, especially women, who were waiting nearby.[40] Additionally, al-Azraqī documented a tradition asserting that those who pray under the *mīzāb* receive the remission of sins, enhancing the symbolic significance of this architectural element.[41] The water pouring from the *mīzāb* was not just seen as a natural occurrence but imbued with profound spiritual connotation.

4.5. *The ritual cover of the Kaʿba* (kiswa)

The Kaʿba, as we have seen, is perceived by many Muslims as a living entity. This conception is vividly illustrated in the mystical dialogue between Ibn ʿArabī and the Kaʿba, as described in Gregory Vandamme's article in this publication. This notion of the Kaʿba as a living being can also be observed in ritual practice: since pre-Islamic times, it has been customary to cover the Kaʿba with a *kiswa*, a ceremonial cloth that drapes the structure and is replaced annually. Today, the *kiswa* is a finely worked cloth of immense artistic and religious value, adorned with elaborate Islamic calligraphy woven with gold and silver threads. Made with intricate craftsmanship, the *kiswa* serves both as a protective covering and as a symbol of reverence. At the conclusion of the *ḥaǧǧ*, ritual pilgrimage, the *kiswa* is cut into pieces and distributed as a contact relic, symbolising a tangible connection to the sanctity of the Kaʿba. These fragments are given to pilgrims, officials, and notable individuals, creating a widespread distribution of its pieces across the Islamic world. Over centuries, fragments of *kiswa* have found their way into Islamic art collections in museums globally, such as Istanbul's Topkapi Palace Museum, where they are preserved as revered artifacts and hold immense historical, artistic, and devotional significance.[42]

4.6. *The washing of the Kaʿba*

The Kaʿba undergoes a symbolic purification ritual twice a year, which further reinforces the idea that it is perceived by believers as a living entity. These ceremonial washings take place on the first of the Islamic month of šaʿbān, one month before ramaḍān, and again on the 15th of muḥarram. This ritual is more than a simple cleaning: it is a deeply symbolic act in which the Kaʿba is cleansed and anointed with a mixture of Zamzam water and fine perfumes, symbolising purity and the sacredness of the site. The ceremony is conducted under the authority of the Banū Šayba, the traditional custodians of the Kaʿba's keys, who, according to

40. Ibn Ǧubayr, *Travels*, pp. 134–135.
41. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 438–439.
42. Nassar 2013.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Islamic tradition, were appointed by the Prophet Muḥammad himself.[43] On these occasions, the Banū Šayba open the door to the Kaʿba, allowing the interior to be washed. The walls, both inside and outside, are wiped with cloths soaked in Zamzam water, while scents such as Ṭāʾif or Kashan rose (*ʿūd*) and musk—perfumes associated with the prophetic Sunna—are used to fragrance the space. Palm leaves are often employed in the process, symbolically connecting the ritual with Islamic tradition and natural elements.[44] This practice of washing the Kaʿba has historical and cultural significance, reinforcing the continuity of rituals that have endured for centuries. The fragrances used, like musk and rose water, not only sanctify the site but also carry symbolic meaning, representing spiritual purity and divine connection. The ceremony attracts global attention, and fragments of the cloths used in the washing may be kept as contact relics, valued by Muslims worldwide for their association with the holy site.

5. Relics associated with Muḥammad formerly kept at the Kaʿba

During the Ottoman Empire's retreat from Hejaz in 1916, the Ottomans sought to safeguard the relics associated with the Prophet Muḥammad and housed in the Ḥaram complex in Mecca from potential dispersal or destruction during the British-backed Arab insurrection. The Ottoman governor at the time, Fakhreddin Pasha (d. 1948), undertook a mission to transfer these relics to Istanbul. With a contingent of around 2,000 soldiers, he arranged for the relics to be transported, probably by train, ensuring their protection during the journey to the Ottoman capital, where they are now in the Topkapi Palace Museum.[45] This action by Fakhreddin Pasha preserved these important artifacts from possible destruction, particularly from the incoming Wahhabi forces, who held reformist views that frowned upon the veneration of relics. In 1926, a decade later, Saudi forces under Wahhabi influence finally took control of Hejaz. Had these relics remained in the Hejaz, they could undoubtedly have been subject to destruction. Consequently, apart from the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina, few if any relics associated with the Prophet survive in Saudi Arabia today.

6. Conclusion

Through an examination of Islamic historiographical and exegetical sources, this article has attempted to demonstrate how certain relics associated with the Kaʿba, whether of supernatural origin or contact relics, often associated with prophetic figures, reveal a complex interaction between continuity and transformation in their ritual use. Some practices, such as the veneration of the Black Stone and the Station of Abraham, have roots in pre-Islamic traditions and were later reinterpreted and legitimised within the framework of Islamic monotheism. Other relics, such as certain objects associated with the Kaʿba, highlight the evolving nature of

43. Sourdel-Thomine 1971.
44. Peters 1994, pp. 136–137.
45. Küçükaşcı 2015.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

devotional practices. Rituals involving these relics—touching, kissing, or asking for blessings—emphasise at once the material and spiritual nature of Islamic devotion. As we have observed, the Kaʿba is regarded by the faithful as a living entity; each year, it is adorned with a new covering, lovingly draped over its structure, and treated with great reverence. Pilgrims and visitors approach it with a sense of devotion, touching and rubbing its surface, allowing it to absorb the warmth and humidity of countless bodies in a shared act of worship.

This article also sheds light on the tensions between traditional veneration practices and the thought of some Islamic Reformation movements, particularly in the contemporary era. Wahhabi and Salafi criticisms of the veneration of tombs and relics, rooted in a strict interpretation of Islamic monotheism, have led to the restriction of physical access to some of them, such as the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Station of Abraham. Despite these challenges, the relics of the Kaʿba continue to hold deep symbolic and spiritual significance for Muslims around the world.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the relics of the Kaʿba are not merely historical artefacts but dynamic elements of Islamic faith and practice. They embody the sacred history of Islam, the continuity of Abrahamic traditions, and the lived experiences of millions of believers who seek closeness to the divine through these tangible manifestations of holiness.

Bibliography

Primary sources

al-Albānī, *al-Taḥḍīr*
al-Albānī, *al-Taḥḍīr al-sāǧid min ittiḫāḏ al-qubūr masāǧid*, n.n., Beirut, 1983.

al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*
al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka wa mā ǧāʾa fīhā min al-āṯār*, ʿA.M. Duhayš (ed.), Mecca, 2003.

al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*
al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī*, 10 vols., Markaz al-buḥūth wa taqniyyat al-maʿlūmāt (ed.), Cairo, Beirut, 2012.

al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka*
al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka fī qadīm al-dahr wa-ḥadīthihi*, 6 vols., ʿA.M. Duhayš (ed.), Beirut, 1994.

Ibn Ǧubayr, *Travels*
Ibn Ǧubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr: A Medieval Journey from Cordoba to Jerusalem*, R. Broadhurst (ed.), London, 1952.

Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*
Ibn Hišām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 4 vols., ʿU.ʿA. Tadmurī (ed.), Beirut, 1990.

Ibn Taymiyya, *Manāsik al-ḥaǧǧ*
Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb manāsik al-ḥaǧǧ*, A.ʿĀ. al-Yatāmī (ed.), Riyadh, 2018.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Secondary sources

Aydın 2004
H. Aydın, *The Sacred Trusts: Pavilion of the Sacred Relics, Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul*, Somerset, 2004.

Belting 1994
H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, Chicago, London, 1994.

Beránek, Ťupek 2018
O. Beránek, P. Ťupek, *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry*, Edinburgh, 2018.

Dumézil 1958
G. Dumézil, "Sur l'inscription du Lapis Niger", *REL* 36, 1958, pp. 109–111.

Freeman 2001
C. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, New Haven, London, 2001.

Kellner 2024
M. Kellner, "Visiting the Prophet at His Grave: Discussions About the Religious Topography of Madina", *Religions* 15/552, 2024, pp. 1–12, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050552.

Kister 1971
M.J. Kister, "*Maqām Ibrāhīm*: A Stone with an Inscription", *Muséon* 84, 1971, pp. 477–491.

Küçükaşcı 2015
M.S. Küçükaşcı, "Sacred Relics in Istanbul", in *History of Istanbul: From Antiquity to the 21th Century*, vol. 5, 2015, https://istanbultarihi.ist/546-sacred-relics-in-istanbul.

Nassar 2013
N. Nassar, "Dar al-Kiswa al-Sharifa: Administration and Production", in V. Porter, L. Saif (eds.), *The Hajj: Collected Essays*, BMRP 193, London, 2013, pp. 175–183.

Patrizi 2023
L. Patrizi, "Le dépôt sacré. Les reliques du prophète Muḥammad, entre dévotion et fondement du pouvoir", in N. Amri, R. Chih, S. Reichmuth (eds.), *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, vol. 3: *Prophetic Piety: Individual and Collective Manifestations*, HbOr I/159, Leiden, Boston, 2023, pp. 223–249.

Peters 1994
F.E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, Princeton, 1994.

Rubin 1986
U. Rubin, "The Kaʿba: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times", *JSAI* 8, 1986, pp. 97–131.

Shalem 2005
A. Shalem, "Made for the Show: The Medieval Treasury of the Kaʿba in Mecca", in B. O'Kane (ed.), *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, Edinburgh, 2005, pp. 269–284.

Sourdel-Thomine 1971
J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Clefs et serrures de la Kaʿba. Notes d'épigraphie arabe", *REI* 39/1, 1971, pp. 29–86.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net