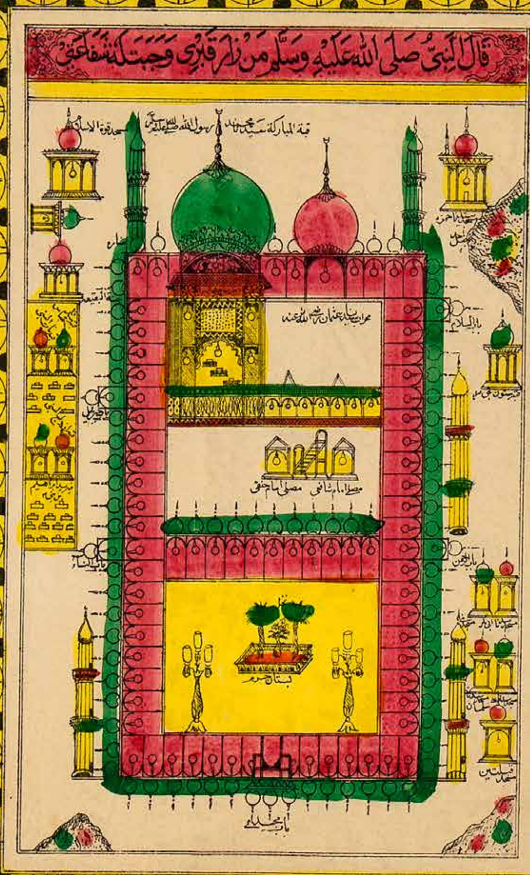
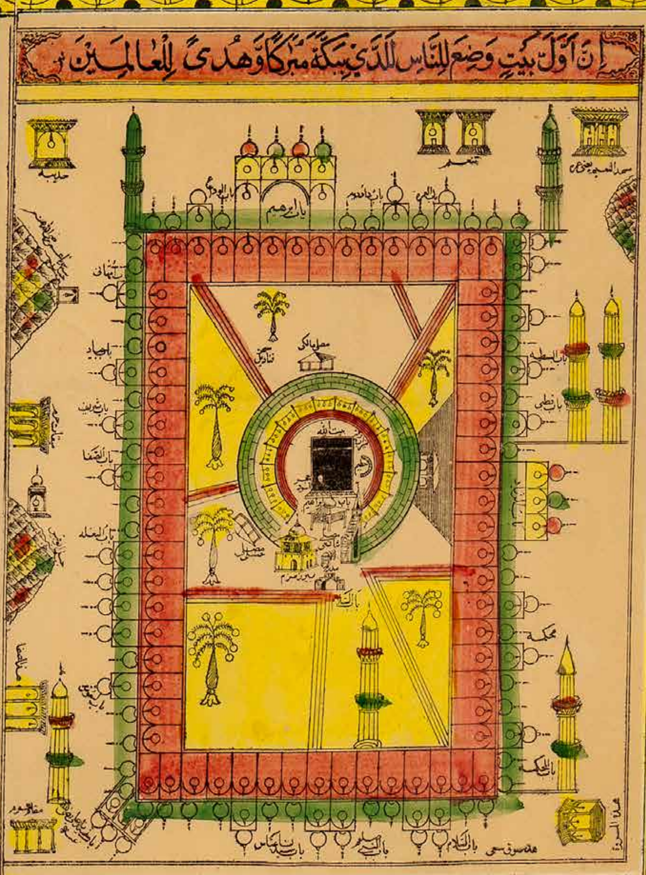
Hajj

Global Interactions through Pilgrimage





edited by

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Hajj Murals in Dakhla Oasis (Egypt)[1]

Remke Kruk and Frans Oort

In *Morgen bloeien de abrikozen* (*Tomorrow the apricots will be in bloom*), the Dutch poet Bertus Aafjes gives a fascinating account of the murals devoted to the pilgrimage to Mecca that he saw in a popular quarter of Cairo:

> The white, front wall of the house usually showed, in a primitive fashion, the route that the traveller to Mecca had followed. The starting point were the three pyramids of Giza. Then the voyage by ship through the blue Red Sea. Next, the trip by camel (a camel with the head of a shrew) through the yellow desert, which was usually inhabited by two or three primitive lions (so primitive that they looked like a cross between a monstrous dog and a monstrous cat). And finally, the joyous arrival at the Ka'ba in Mecca. (Aafjes 1954: 132-133)[2]

What Aafjes describes here is the Egyptian custom to celebrate a Hajj pilgrim's homecoming by decorating his house, marking the successful completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Aafjes' view is that of a tourist, not a scholar, and consequently it is somewhat naïve. To the more sophisticated eye, it would be obvious that most of the pictures—*i.e.* lions, camel trips, and the pyramids—do not refer to the actual reality experienced by the pilgrim, but rather are emblematic of certain aspects of the pilgrimage: danger, travel in Arabia, and place of departure.

The custom of decorating the pilgrim's house with murals is most widely spread in Egypt, but also occurs in other countries such as Libya, Syria, and the Israel-Palestine region. Aafjes makes no mention of Arabic writings, but written text is an essential part of the murals. The core part usually consists of an inscription proclaiming that God has granted the pilgrim, mentioned by name, the favour of completing the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that every able Muslim has to perform at least once in his or her life. This inscription is usually, but not always, placed above the entrance of the house. To this inscription may be added various other elements: drawings of the Ka'ba, images of the forms of transport that might be used on the pilgrimage, the mosque where the Prophet is buried, or pious inscriptions with decorative borders. These decorations may be found on the façade of the house or on the adjacent walls. Inside the house,

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1 Our research in Dakhla was made possible through the help of our colleagues participating in the Dakhla Oasis Project (DOP), especially Dr. Tony Mills, Director of DOP, who offered us generous hospitality at the DOP Research Centre in Ayn al-Jindi.

2 Ine Jellema drew Remke Kruk's attention to this passage.

Figure 1: Bands of Qur'anic texts relating to the Hajj inside the house of Muhammad Salim, the director of the antiquities department in Dakhla (al-Jadida, 1426 AH (2005 CE)). Photo: F. Leemhuis.

the walls of the areas visited by guests are also often decorated with long bands of text, usually verses from the Qur'an referring to the pilgrimage (figure 1). Spectacular murals can be seen in the Nile Valley, for instance in the Luxor region, and coffee-table-type books that include pictures as well as useful factual information, such as those of Parker (1995) and Chèvre (2000), have regularly been devoted to the murals.

History

How old the custom is, we do not know. In the past, it was not the sort of thing many people paid attention to, and descriptions of such unsophisticated manifestations of popular art were usually not included in travel accounts. They generally were not noticed at all. There are, however, a few exceptions. The Ottoman author Mustafa Ali, in his description of Cairo dating from 1599, makes the following remark:

> The nice custom is also highly praised by wise people that one of the relatives of the person that undertakes the pilgrimage, one who is known to be sincerely devoted to him, has the Koran verse on the pilgrimage [sura 3: 97, al-Imran] inscribed with large letters on the wall of his door. Some even decorate it with various embellishments and colors. Those who pass through that street will know for sure that the owner of that house has gone on the pilgrimage that year. (Mustafâ `Alî 1975: 33)

More about the history of pilgrimage murals and their interpretation can be found in Campo (1991: 143-146). Here we may just mention E.W. Lane's description, based on his observations in Cairo between 1825 and 1835, because it refers to pictorial elements still encountered in today's murals:

> It is a common custom to ornament the entrance of a pilgrim's house, a day, or two or three days, before his arrival; painting the door, and colouring the alternate courses of stone on each side and above with red ochre, and whitewash; or, if it be of brick, ornamenting it in a similar manner, with broad horizontal stripes of red and white: often, also trees, camels, etc., are painted in a very rude manner, in green, black, red, and other colours. The pilgrim sometimes writes to order this to be done. (2003: 438)

Earlier Studies and Approaches

It has long been clear that, contrary to what more naïve observers have sometimes thought, the murals are not made by the pilgrims themselves and do not contain memories of things seen on the pilgrimage. Rather, the decorations are made by friends and relatives of the pilgrims to prepare for their homecoming, and the images are intended to highlight symbolically the major elements of the pilgrimage.

Several studies over the years have been devoted to murals in various parts of Egypt, both in Cairo (Michot, in 1978) and Upper Egypt (Canova in 1975 and Campo, who also included Cairo, Fayum, and Suez, in 1991). These studies were made several decades ago, but the mural custom is still widespread in Egypt. Though the impression one gets these days is that the higher social classes in Egypt now tend to see it as an old-fashioned, rural (*baladi*) custom. The fact that Hajj murals in Cairo are mostly found in the poorer popular quarters confirms this. We saw many beautiful murals, recently executed, in the Qarafa, the historical (but still used) cemetery covering many square miles and that is inhabited by poor families. Sentiments about the *baladi* nature of the murals are on the rise not only in Cairo, but also in the rural areas themselves. When Muhammad Salim, the director of the antiquities department in Dakhla Oasis, performed the pilgrimage in 2005, he did not at first want his house to be

Figure 2: Announcement of completion of the Hajj on the house Muhammad Salim, director of the antiquities department in Dakhla (al-Jadida, 1426 AH (2005 CE)). Photo: F. Leemhuis.

decorated, considering the custom old-fashioned and *baladi.* In the end, he agreed on an inscription above the entrance of his house but stipulated that the accompanying Qur'anic texts could only appear on the inside walls of his house (figure 2).

Of the studies made in the past, three deserve special attention because they offer elucidative views on the nature and function of the murals. The first is that of Giovanni Canova, who studied 57 murals in Upper Egypt made between 1938 and 1975, predominantly in the Luxor area (Canova 1975). Besides describing the murals and their elements, pictorial as well as epigraphic, he explains the decorating of pilgrims' houses in the wider context of the importance of the Hajj for pilgrims and those around them, which is brought into focus by farewell and welcoming ceremonies. He briefly discusses such matters as who executes the decorations (sons or pupils, preferably, but also sometimes professional painters) and the difference of opinion about whether it is permitted to include representations of human beings and animals. He also speaks about the semiotic aspect of the murals, pointing out how the meaning and wider implication of each particular element can immediately be grasped by all who see it, being part of a sign language understood by the whole community. 'The presence of a single element, for instance the Ka'ba, suffices to let the "signified" emerge in its globality' (Canova 1975: 91).

Jean Michot described 50 Cairene murals that he studied in the early 1970s. He gives a lucid and well-documented analysis of the motifs and epigraphs he found and includes all the relevant details. He also gives a clear picture of the social and religious contexts in which these decorations are produced, arguing that the process of decorating the house offers the friends and relatives of pilgrims the opportunity to share the religious experience. To this, they offer up their own emblematic representations of what they see as the meaningful aspects of the Hajj (Michot 1978).

Juan Eduardo Campo, who analysed the murals of 36 houses in the Qena governorate, Greater Cairo, Suez, and Fayum between 1976 and 1985, deserves special attention. He characterises them as sets of simple drawings with a limited set of motifs, accompanied by texts that are of a strikingly formulaic character: the pious formulas known as *basmala* ('In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'), *talbiya* ('At your service, o God')*, tasliya* ('God bless him and give him peace'), and *takbir* ('God is most great') are much in evidence, as are Qur'anic verses, often in abbreviated form. In his opinion, this all points to people working from memory. He presents a full classification of iconic motifs arranged according to theme, as well as an overview and classification of the texts in the epigraphs (Campo 1991: 139-191).

Arguing that one cannot treat the murals as a haphazard conglomerate of figurative elements and inscriptions, Campo states that one should look for 'the regularities governing the relations between the elements'. To this purpose, like Canova before him, he approaches the murals from a semiotic point of view, seeing them as a set of elements that has a message to convey or, we might say, a story to tell:

> Seen semiotically, Hajj murals are three-dimensional, highly metaphoric forms of discourse. Although they are not as fragmentary, bizarre, or offensive as many have claimed, neither

> are they as precise or abstract as theological, legal, or philosophical discourses. The murals are paratactic in structure; that is, they are built up of limited sets of motifs, formulaic phrases, and principles of composition. In fact, they are remarkably similar to, but not identical with, oral genres of poetry, song, myth, and epic. (1991: 149)

Campo also presents the interesting view that the murals affect the meaning of domestic space in the sense that they serve to sacralise domestic space. The pilgrim's Hajj has transformed him into someone with a higher religious status who should return to a house that is in accordance with this new status. Decoration with the appropriate symbols gives the house, in a way, the aspect of a shrine. In Campo's view, the fact that the decorative elements are often the same as the ones used to decorate shrines, including Christian shrines, supports this idea.

Campo, like Michot before him, further observes that the murals include many elements that also occur in the context of apotropaic magic, for instance on amulets. Examples mentioned include mermaids, camels, birds, fish, snakes, flowers, palms, stars, crescents, hands, and eyes (Campo 1991: 156). Both Michot and Campo consider such elements to have an apotropaic function, warding off the evil caused by other people's envy (*hasad*) about the pilgrim's new status. *Hasad* is much feared because it may activate destructive powers. They may have a point, especially in the case of the hands and the eye, but one may also take into account that, in the culture from which these murals stem, figurative representations were traditionally scarce. For simple lack of examples, such representations as there were tended to be used over and over again in a variety of contexts. In the same way, the images familiar from magic books and amulets, such as fishes, mermaids, snakes, and scorpions, may have been used simply for their decorative value, just like pharaonic representations are incorporated in the regions where examples are abundant. This tradition, once established, may simply have been continued, even when pictorial representations of all kinds became available on a large scale.

Research on this material so far has mainly concentrated on Greater Cairo and the Nile Valley, although the books of Parker (1995) and especially Chèvre (2000) also include other locations (Alexandria, al-Arish, Port Said, Suez, some of the Western oases). The mural custom is widespread in the Western oases, and it seemed worthwhile to have a closer look in order to see whether the murals there presented any new views. As a start, we decided to survey the murals found in the oasis of Dakhla (ad-Dakhila), some 350 kilometres west of Luxor.

Observations in Dakhla Oasis

The Dakhla Oasis covers an area of roughly 80 kilometres by 25 kilometres. It has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and all the successive cultures of Egypt have left their traces there. As to its Islamic past, recent archaeological

work by Fred Leemhuis in Qasr, one of the two towns of Dakhla, has shown that it is beyond a doubt that the town dates back to the days of the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171 CE). According to an estimate from 2003, the oasis houses some 75,000 inhabitants spread over two towns and a number of villages and hamlets. Hajj murals are found in all these locations, with the exception of the Bedouin settlement just outside Mut.

The first impression one gets from a casual observance of the Dakhla Hajj murals is that they are, on the whole, simple and schematic. The predominance of simple textual announcements, frequently (but not always) accompanied by a small and highly stylised icon of the Ka'ba, also is conspicuous. Closer observation of each village yielded a more varied picture but did not basically change the impression that the murals in Dakhla are much less exuberant than those in the Nile Valley.

Our survey was done during visits between 2004 and 2006. We included all the major locations, fourteen in total, namely Qasr, Mushiya, al-Jadida, Qalamun, Izab al-Qasr (which is in fact a cluster of small villages), Badkhulu, ar-Rashda (ar-Rashida), Mut, Shaykh al-Wali, Asmant (Smint), Ma'sara, Balat, Bashindi, and Tineda (Tanida). In the towns of Qasr and Mut, we simply collected a number of what we hope are representative samples. In the villages our coverage of the material was much wider, although we cannot lay a claim to completeness; in the mazes of small alleys and courtyards, specimens may easily have been missed despite the helpful assistance of the villagers. The total number of Hajj announcements that we studied, counted by pictures of the Ka'ba that we collected, was about 110. Add to that some announcements that did not include a representation of the Ka'ba, and the number roughly amounts to 120, many of which we photographed.

Our interest in these specifically Muslim and rather unsophisticated drawings sometimes astonished the villagers. They found our interest in the accompanying calligraphic texts easier to understand. Occasionally someone asked us whether we intended to use the material for picture postcards. Such postcards, usually with murals from the Luxor area, are indeed sold in tourist shops elsewhere in Egypt.

Our survey was largely restricted to the exteriors of houses. In some cases we were given the opportunity to look inside, but on the whole people did not appreciate this. The inside decorations that we observed consisted exclusively of pious texts, usually Qur'anic verses. We did not include these in the survey.

Hajj murals were much in evidence in all the locations. They were found on traditional mud-brick houses and on more modern types of buildings, usually on the façades but often on the adjacent walls as well. Most of them were not nearly as spectacular as in Luxor and the adjacent villages in the Nile Valley; nevertheless, they were fascinating in their variety and contents. The oldest sample we collected was dated 1397 AH (1977 CE), part of which is reproduced in Figure 5. The latest specimen included in our survey dated from 1425 AH (2005 CE) and can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 3: Announcement of completion of the Hajj by a woman, Fatima Muhammad Zayn ad-Din (Mut, 1413 AH (1993 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

One of our purposes was to find out whether there were noteworthy differences between the Hajj murals of Dakhla and those studied earlier and to see whether observations in Dakhla could throw additional light on the views of earlier scholars (notably, Michot and Campo). We also took notice of the changes that could be observed during the period that the murals in our survey were made (1977–2005). A further question was whether there were substantial differences between the various locations of Dakhla itself. We took into account the iconic representations as well as the texts, although our inventory of the latter was less systematic and extensive than Campo's; we mainly noted down texts that significantly diverged from what was included in his inventory.

In Dakhla, like elsewhere, the murals demonstrate the importance of performing the Hajj. A remarkable illustration of this were the empty, whitewashed spaces that we sometimes noticed above the entrances of houses. These were spaces already prepared to receive the announcement of a successfully completed pilgrimage, perhaps not even this year but 'hopefully next year', as people told us. As such, the spaces served not only to strengthen people in their intentions, but also to make these intentions public.

Another remarkable case was a mural on a half-finished house of limestone and redbrick announcing the pilgrimage of a woman. Most likely she was the mother of the inhabitant, and the implication might be that sending the mother on pilgrimage had taken financial priority over finishing the house (figure 3).

The elements of the Dakhla murals are not, in a general sense, different from what has so far been observed: they consist of pictures, pious texts, and other decorative elements, such as ornamental borders. These elements usually, but by no means always,

appear in combination. Studied in more detail, the iconic representations used in Dakhla roughly correspond to what has been described in earlier publications, but the set of representations is considerably more limited.

Like elsewhere, the central element is the *i'lan,* the announcement that God has granted the resident of the house or one of his family members the favour of completing the Hajj pilgrimage. Often the people involved were a couple, in which case the wife was referred to as *as-sayyida haramuhu* (madam, his wife). If the pilgrims were a son and his mother, the mother was referred to as *as-sayyida walidatuhu* (madam, his mother). If a woman had performed the pilgrimage on her own, her full name was mentioned.

The month and year of the pilgrimage were given, the latter often according to the Islamic as well as the Gregorian calendar. Frequently the date given was that of the *wuquf* ceremony at Mount or Jabal Arafat. Sometimes the performance of the Umra, the 'lesser pilgrimage', was also mentioned, either in addition to mention of the Hajj or on its own. In the latter case the person involved was always referred to as a *hajji,* implying that the obligatory greater pilgrimage, the Hajj, had already been performed. The Umra usually had been performed during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, but occasionally also in the seventh month, *Rajab*. The word *ziyara* (visit) was regularly used to refer to the Hajj (e.g. *ziyarat bayt Allah*, 'visit of the house of God'; or *ziyarat bayt Allah al-haram,* 'visit of the holy house of God'). In addition, there was the occasional mention of the visit to the Prophet's grave (*sunnat az-ziyara,* 'the advisable custom of the visit').

The announcement was usually, but not always, placed above the central entrance of the house. It was often surrounded by a frame consisting of simple lines or a decorative border. Sometimes this frame had the shape of a mosque's cupola with the new moon on top, and it was occasionally flanked by minarets. Such frames were particularly popular in the villages of Asmant and Badkhulu (figure 4). A picture of the Ka'ba, either schematically or more elaborately drawn, was sometimes included in the frame, as were other other basic elements of Hajj iconography such as an aeroplane, a ship, a bus, or the cupola of the Prophet's grave. Iconic elements, however, were more commonly placed outside the *i'lan* frame.

In its most basic form, the announcement of having performed the pilgrimage is all there is. Keeping announcements as sober as possible was indeed the trend in some villages, notably in Tineda. In most cases, however, the announcement was surrounded by an amalgam of iconic elements, texts, and decorations that together tell the story of the pilgrimage and the importance attached to it. Here, too, distinct trends in style can be observed from locality to locality: a motif, once introduced, is imitated, so that walking through the village one can follow trends, motifs, themes, and even specific pots of paint.

Figure 4: Announcement in the shape of a mosque's cupola with new moon on top (Badkhulu 1415 AH (1994 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

When we asked villagers about who executed the murals, we got different answers: sometimes it was 'just anyone' who could draw a bit, but often the work was done by professionals. The calligraphic quality and stereotyped nature of the more recent announcements clearly indicated that professional craftsmen had been at work, as was indeed the case. Often, the professionals were local schoolmasters who sometimes had also set up shops where they worked in the afternoons (when school was finished) as photographers and calligraphers. These professionals had taken to signing their work, especially in villages where more than one of them was active. All in all, we identified the names of thirteen *khattat*s (calligraphers) who had signed their names on the murals.

As earlier scholars have noted, the decorations are rarely kept up after they have been applied. Occasionally announcements may be re-used if another member of the family goes on pilgrimage (Hajj or Umra), in which case the colours are refreshed or the whole announcement is rewritten to include the new information. This can be seen by the inclusion of different dates in the announcement. Otherwise the murals,

having served their purpose to celebrate the pilgrim's homecoming, are left to fade or fall into decay. Passing in 2007 by the same roads where we collected our material two or three years earlier, we noted that murals which had looked fresh and colourful when we photographed them two years earlier had already faded or crumbled with the walls. Given the sand storms that regularly sweep the area, this is hardly surprising.

An Inventory of Specific Elements of the Dakhla Murals

What follows is an inventory and discussion of the various elements—or sign units, to use the semiotic term—that we found in the Dakhla murals. The two main categories of sign units are epigraphic formulae and figural elements. Campo deals extensively with the epigraphic formulae, dividing them into five thematic groupings in descending order of frequency: God, the Prophet Muhammad, pilgrimage and holy places, divine blessing, and victory over adversity. Findings in Dakhla largely agree with this, and we do not treat the epigraphic formulae in detail. Notable, however, was a case not included in Campo's inventory, namely a mural in Mut featuring sura 112 (*al-Ikhlas*), a text widely used for pious purposes, including warding off evil.

Our focus in this chapter is on the figural elements. To facilitate comparison with earlier research, we roughly follow the classification used by Campo in Appendix B of his 'The metamorphosis of domestic space in the pilgrimage murals of Egypt', which notes the frequency with which the elements occurred in his own survey as well as those of Michot and Canova (Campo 1991: 181-182).

Campo's categories include a) Pilgrimage and holy places (subdivided into eight categories, six of which were found in Dakhla); b) General Islamic religious motifs (subdivided into six categories, two of which appeared in our Dakhla survey); c) Egyptian culture (with six sub-categories, none of which turned up in the Dakhla murals); d) Plants, trees, and animals (with ten sub-categories, only four of which were found in Dakhla); and e) Designs and talismanic figures (with four sub-categories, only one of which was present in Dakhla).

A. Pilgrimage and holy places

1. Transport

As was pointed out by earlier scholars, the iconic images referring to travel in the murals should not be taken as a literal reference to the transport that was actually used: they just convey the general idea of transport to Mecca. A mural may contain both a ship and an aeroplane, but it is hardly likely that both were used. Yet there is some connection to actual local reality, as trains and carriages will occasionally turn up in the murals of the Nile Valley but not in Dakhla. Buses, on the other hand, which, apart from private cars, form Dakhla's sole connection with other urban areas, appear from time to time in the murals of Dakhla. Buses, of course, also play a major role in transporting pilgrims from the airport in Jeddah to Mecca as well as during the Hajj itself. Ships resembling

cruise ships appear in murals everywhere, as do schematically drawn sailing vessels, recalling Nile feluccas. Camels, the major form of transportation in the past, occasionally appear in older murals. The following inventory demonstrates the actual occurrence of transport images.

Camels: Six images of camels were found, some showing just a camel or a frieze of camels, others a camel being led or people riding a camel. Example: a man leading two camels with saddles, part of the oldest mural that we collected, dated 1977 CE (figure 5).

Aeroplanes: We found 27 images of aeroplanes, fairly equally distributed over the different locations. We recorded none in Mushiya, al-Jadida, Balat, and Tineda. The planes were often rather primitively drawn, although sometimes with attention to detail, such as a plane bearing the letters UNAR (figure 6). The oldest plane we saw dated from 1404 AH (1984 CE), and the most recent was from 1420 AH (2001 CE).

Buses: Only two buses were found, both in Mut (figure 7).

Ships (powered by steam or motors): We recorded eighteen ships, divided over seven locations and executed between 1993 and 2002. Ships were drawn even more primitively than aeroplanes, with some resembling a whistling tea kettle (figure 8).

Figure 5: A man leading two camels with saddles (Badkhulu, 1397 AH (1977 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 6: Airplane (Mut, 1410 AH (1990 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 7: Bus (Mut, 1419 AH (1999 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 8: Steamship (Izab al-Qasr, 1423 AH (2002 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 9: Sailboat (Ma'sara, mural bearing two dates: 1404 AH (1984 CE) and 1409 AH (1989 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 10: A highly stylized image of the Ka'ba (Qalamun 1419 AH (1999 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Sailboats: We found seven images of sailboats. They were not always easily recognizable: sometimes they looked like a new moon lying on its back with an umbrella in the middle. Figure 9 provides an example of an image that is unmistakably a sailboat.

2. The Ka'ba

We found some 110 images of the Ka'ba. Such images are a central element of the murals, and it is rare to find an announcement of a completed pilgrimage without it. Ka'ba images appear in many varieties. They can be drawn as a simple black and white cube (figure 10); with inscriptions; with a curtain hanging over it; flanked by lamp posts; encircled by a suggestion of people performing the circumambulation (*tawaf*); with the colonnades and minarets of the *haram* in the background; and even flanked by cypresses. Combinations of all these elements occur.

Ka'bas, with or without *tawaf,* were sometimes placed within the frame containing the Hajj announcement. The more elaborate images of the Ka'ba including colonnades and minarets were usually, but not always, placed outside the text frames (figure 11).

Occasionally the Ka'ba was placed in a separate frame together with other iconic Hajj depictions such as means of transport.

3. Medina

Mosque: We found some sixteen images of the mosque in which the Prophet is buried, an image that serves as an icon for Medina in general. It was not always possible to establish beyond a doubt that it was actually this mosque that was intended to be depicted. A mosque cupola (sometimes coloured

Figure 11: Ka'ba with people performing the tawaf, colonnades, and minarets in the background (Ma'sara mural bearing two dates: 1404 AH (1984 CE) and 1409 AH (1989 CE)). Photo: F. Oort.

Figure 12: Palm tree, symbolizing Medina, as alternative for an image of the Prophet's burial mosque. Part of a series of drawings, each representing an iconic element of the Hajj (Ma'sara, mural bearing two dates: 1404 AH (1984 CE) and 1409 AH (1989 CE)). Photo: F. Oort

green) with at least one minaret and usually a new moon on top was the most basic form in which this icon appeared. In one case, there was just a greenish cupola. Otherwise all sorts of varieties occur, including mosques with gates; with more minarets; and with birds on the roof or in the air. No *minbar*s (Prophet's pulpit) were recorded in the murals. The mosques were regularly accompanied by the *Hadith* saying that the Prophet will give his intercession to those who visit his grave.

Date palms: Palm trees, usually bearing date bunches, often appear in the murals, but they should not simply be classified as 'nature elements' along with the flowers, trees, and floral scrolls that also appear occasionally. Palm trees are strongly connected to Medina[3] and indeed symbolise Medina in many cases, such as in a mural presenting just two images, a Ka'ba and a palm tree, to indicate visits to Mecca as well as Medina. Another mural shows a palm tree with dates, an image that is part of an amalgam in which the portion of the walls between windows each bear a significant element of Hajj iconography: the Ka'ba, a sailboat, a man praying at Arafat, an aeroplane, a second sailboat, a second Ka'ba, and a palm tree (figure 12).

4. *Mahmal*

No examples of this were found in the Dakhla murals.

5. Pilgrims

Representations of pilgrims and of human beings in general are relatively rare in the Dakhla murals, but we found three murals with obvious representations of individual pilgrims. One of them was in Ma'sara and showed a man praying at Arafat and another standing man in *ihram* clothing**.** The mural bears two

Figure 13: Standing (probably praying) woman (Bashindi, 1405 AH (1985 CE)). It is one of the two representations of a woman that we found in the murals. Photo: F. Oort.

3 The Prophet's daughter Fatima is reported to have planted two palm trees in her garden, and images of her grave frequently include these palm trees. (See for instance, Porter, Abdel Haleem, Armstrong, Irwin, Kennedy & Sardar 2012: 82 [fig. 50], 105 [fig. 69]).

different dates, 1404 AH (1984 CE) and 1409 AH (1989 CE). The other mural showing representations of pilgrims was at Bashindi. It showed a standing (probably praying) woman and a standing man in *ihram* clothing (figure 13). The third showed a woman kneeling in prayer.

In addition to the representation of a pilgrim praying at Arafat, we also found a roundel suggesting a gathering of people at Arafat, the mountain itself in the background. The words *al-Hajj Arafat* ('the pilgrimage is Arafat') are inscribed in the picture. The mural was dated 1405 AH (1985 CE).

There were other representations of people connected to the pilgrimage, but these bore no connection to specific Hajj rituals. There were people leading or riding camels (see above, Camels) and people engaged in various pious activities, such as a man reading a book, probably the Qur'an; a standing man with prayer beads; and a man in traditional attire with a white cap, his hands raised in prayer.

6. Prophet's *minbar*

No examples of this were found in the Dakhla murals.

7. Water sellers

No examples of this were found in the Dakhla murals.

Figure 14: Abraham about to sacrifice his son and an angel bringing a ram as replacement (Bashindi, no date, probably 1980s). Photo: F. Oort

Figure 15: Mosques and minarets (Bashindi, no date). Photo: F. Oort.

8. Abraham's sacrifice

We recorded one representation of Abraham's sacrifice, namely in Bashindi (figure 14). No date could be found, but the mural looked fairly old, perhaps from the 1980s.

B. General Islamic religious motifs

Of Campo's six sub-categories, two were found in Dakhla:

1. New moon

This image was widely found, usually as an ornament on top of mosques.

2. Mosques and minarets

Mosques and minarets were a ubiquitous motif, often used as a frame for the Hajj announcement, as was explained above. A spectacular case of mosques and minarets on their own was found in Bashindi (figure 15).

C. Egyptian culture

The only instance in Dakhla that might possibly fit under this category was that of the coffee pot and cup found on a mural in Ma'sara (figure 16).

Figure 16: Coffee pot and cup as an invitation to enjoy the returned pilgrim's hospitality. Text: 'Drink the drinks of Hajj Abdallah Umar Abd al-Hayy.' (Ma'sara, 1403 AH (1983 CE)). Photo: F. Oort

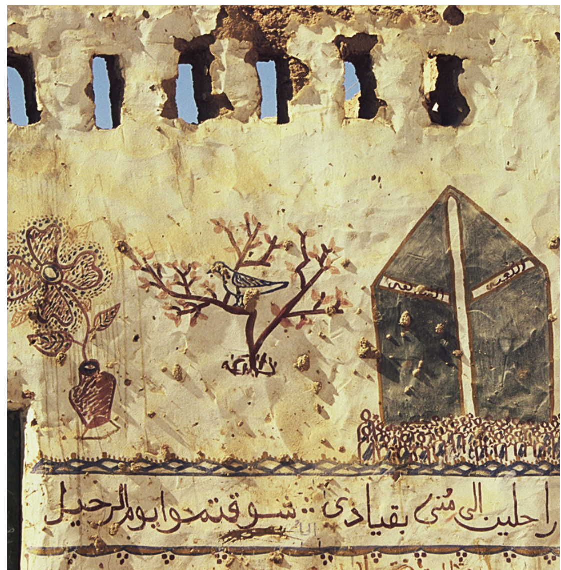

Figure 17: Nature elements: a flower in a vase and a pigeon in a tree (Ma'sara, no date). Photo: F. Oort.

D. Plants, trees, and animals.

Only three of Campo's ten categories (category one, two and four) were found in Dakhla. As to his category three, camels, this was already discussed earlier under the Transport section. The categories found in Dakhla were:

1. Flowers

In Dakhla, flowers were only occasionally included in the murals. We recorded three instances, two of these showing flowers in vases (figure 17).

2. Trees

Palm trees: Palm trees symbolizing Medina have already been discussed above (Medina). Apart from that, palm trees, sometimes in clumps of three, were regularly used in the murals. We found seven instances. An example was a series of palm trees on top of a textual frieze.

Other trees: Three cases were recorded, one with a bird on its branches (see above; Figure 17).

4. Birds

Birds, usually pigeons, regularly appeared in the Dakhla murals. We found six instances. Pigeons are linked in many ways to the pious tradition in Islam, including the Meccan and Medinan sanctuaries visited during the pilgrimage.

E. Designs and talismanic figures

This category of Campo's was only represented in Dakhla by decorative borders along or around written passages and iconic images. Leaf scrolls were also found occasionally. Talismanic figures were completely absent.

Concluding Remarks

The inventory given above demonstrates that a number of elements present in murals elsewhere in Egypt were not found in Dakhla. We did not see any pharaonic elements. Elements connected to the dangers involved in the pilgrimage (*e.g.* soldiers and lions) were also absent. Most noteworthy was the overall absence of magic symbols such as snakes, scorpions, fishes, mermaids, hands, and eyes. Earlier researchers such as Michot and Canova have pointed out the possible function of such symbols in warding off evil, and Campo sees them as further proof that decorating the house has the function of not only sacralising the domestic space of the returning pilgrim, but also warding off harmful influences. The pilgrim's new status is likely to incite *hasad*, a widely feared source of evil, and protective measures have to be taken against it.

Yet one may argue that if warding off evil is such a prominent aspect of decorating the house, the choice of texts (Qur'anic and otherwise), would reflect this. Campo's survey of texts found on the murals, however, does not include any of the standard Qur'anic texts used for this purpose, such as the Throne verse (sura 2: 255), the last three suras of the Qur'an (*al-Ikhlas*, *al-Falaq*, and *an-Nas*), or any other text used as protection. As was said above, in Dakhla we found one instance of sura 112 (*al-Ikhlas*).

Unlike suras 113 and 114 (the *mu'awwidhatan*), however, which explicitly refer to protection from evil, *al-Ikhlas* functions widely as a pious text in general and need not be connected exclusively to warding off the evil of *hasad.* Thus, findings in Dakhla do not support the idea expressed by earlier researchers that an important aspect of the murals is their apotropaic function.

On the basis of the inventory, the following can be said about the Hajj murals of Dakhla. As was already stated, the murals are, on the whole, simple and executed at a minimum cost. During the period covered by our survey (1977–2005), notable changes could be observed, the most important of which was that announcements are getting increasingly simpler and more uniform, restricted to the announcement that the pilgrimage has been fulfilled and an image of the Ka'ba. Other figurative elements, in particular representations of human beings, were mostly found in the older murals. The most recent representation of a human being that we found dated from 1998, but most of them were some years older.

The frequency with which elements occur demonstrates that the central purpose of the murals is to announce that the religious duty of the pilgrimage has been fulfilled. All other elements, such as figural references to transport and even to visiting the Prophet's grave, are decorative extras. On about 110 images of the Ka'ba, we found less than twenty images referring to Medina. We have no way of knowing whether this reflects the actual percentage of visits to Medina, but it does not seem likely. A more probable reason might be that no extra religious prestige was gained from including it in the mural.

As to differences between locations, each village offered its own characteristic images because trends tend to be followed and probably also because the same artist is active. Noteworthy, though, was the almost complete absence of figurative images in Tineda, also in older murals. To a lesser extent, this was also the case in Qasr. In recent years, the tendency to put only sober texts with, at best, a usually highly stylised Ka'ba as illustration is clearly on the rise in most locations. It is unclear whether this is due to the increasing influence of stern orthodox Islamic views in Dakhla or if other factors play a role. The influence of orthodox Islam, indeed, manifests itself in a number of ways: new mosques, stern preachers, and the disapproval or suppression of the veneration of local saints, to name a few. Emphasis on Islamic objections to the representation of living beings, especially in connection to Hajj murals, might be part of this. Discussions about such representations, however, have been going on for many years without notable consequences for actual practice (Campo 1991: 163). One may well argue that the new trend is more likely due to modern, more urban views on the execution of announcements than to orthodox Islamic norms regarding images of people and animals. Announcements should be stylish and not contain childish drawings, which are considered *baladi*—simple and rural.

As to craftsmanship, there, too, professionalism is on the increase. Many announcements nowadays are executed by professional calligraphers, and any drawings present also look professional. A prime example of this is the case of Muhammad Salim's mural from 2005, mentioned above: the Ka'ba painting on his announcement

is, if not high art, definitely a professional piece of painting (Figure 2). Of note here is that this painting was not made on the spot, straight onto the wall of the house, but rather on a wooden board in the painter's shop and then hung above the entrance of the house. This might be taken as a new development, a step on the road to mass production of such announcements, but in fact the custom to paint on loose boards has existed in Dakhla for some time. It is mentioned by Chèvre (2000: 55), and we also saw an example in Badkhulu, dated 1424 AH (2003 CE), of a loose board put against a wall announcing an Umra performed in *Rajab* (August-September).

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