

STRAIGHT PATH

Hajj Exhibition at the British Museum

Prince Charles inaugurates BM Hajj Exhibition

Hajj Exhibition: "Hajj: A Journey to the Heart of Islam", the world's first-ever

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Muslim people across the entire world."

exhibition on Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah, was opened on Thursday, the 26th of January, 2012 at the British Museum, London, by His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, heir apparent to the British throne, in the presence of a large gathering of politicians, parliamentarians, academics and important figures in Britain, led by HRH Prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member of the Board of King Abdul Aziz Public Library; HRH Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz, Ambassador of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in London and HE Mr. Faisal bin Abdul Rahman bin Muammar, General Supervisor of King Abdul Aziz Public Library, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

British-Saudi partnership

This Hajj Exhibition is a product of British-Saudi co-operation and it has been organised in partnership with the King Abdul Abdulaziz Public Library of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which has contributed to the exhibition some of the items reflecting the achievements and the expansion of the Two Holy Mosques since the reign of King Abdul Aziz until now. The Library has worked as a coordinator between the British Museum and museums and institutions in Saudi Arabia to display 51 rare pieces including parts of the curtain of the Ka'aba and rare pictures of Makkah and Madinah, in addition to artefacts from Darb Zubaydah, manuscripts, photographs and films on the Hajj.

The British Museum's Hajj exhibition includes priceless manuscripts, archaeological material, textiles, historic photographs and contemporary art. Loans on show at the exhibition also include significant material from Saudi Arabia including a "Sitarah", which covers the door of the Ka'aba, as well as other historic and contemporary artefacts from key museums in the Middle East.

Loans came from 13 countries. Other objects come from major public and private collections in the UK and around the world, among them the British Library and the Khalili Family Trust. The Hajj Exhibition at the British Museum includes priceless manuscripts, such as the 8th century copy of the Qur'an, priceless manuscripts and textiles, a Victorian Thomas Cook train ticket and blue plastic razors distributed by the Saudi government to all male pilgrims.

The Hajj Exhibition examines three key strands; these are the pilgrim's journey with an emphasis on the major routes used across time, the Hajj today, its associated rituals and what the experience means to the pilgrim and Makkah, the destination of Hajj, its origins and importance.

PRINCE CHARLES INAUGURATES BM HAJJ EXHIBITION

While inaugurating the Hajj Exhibition, HRH Prince Charles, heir apparent to the British throne, said, "I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to have been asked to open this splendid exhibition celebrating the Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam and thus of the greatest possible significance to the spiritual and temporal lives of

Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz

In the beginning of the ceremony, hosted by Prince Charles, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah delivered a speech in which he welcomed Prince Charles, the audience and the guests of the exhibition. He appreciated the initiative of the British Museum and having the partnership of the first exhibition on the Hajj in Britain with the participation of King Abdul Aziz Public Library. He highlighted the importance of pilgrimage for being the largest gathering of Islam, goodness



and devotion to God the Creator on the plain of Makkah; a safe sanctuary devoid of harm and violence and where pilgrims are devoted for the pure and lofty worship of the Creator.

Prince Abdul Aziz also pointed out that Saudi Arabia's participation in this cultural exhibition aims to introduce the pilgrimage and to highlight the humanitarian aspects of pilgrimage since ancient time until now, and to display in this Museum the rare objects and artefacts as living evidences of the humanitarian values from diverse Muslim cultures and civilizations. Prince Abdul Aziz addressed the efforts of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz saying: "Tangible efforts exerted by Saudi Arabia to spread peace all over the world through the initiatives of the Man of Peace, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and his humanitarian projects include the service of the Hajj and the development of the Holy Sites' facilities in Makkah.

Prince Charles emphasized the spiritual aspect of the trip

Then the patron of the event HRH Prince Charles delivered a speech in which he said: "I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to open this splendid exhibition celebrating the Hajj, one of the pillars of Islam." He went on to say that the Hajj is of the greatest possible significance to the spiritual and temporal lives of Muslim people across the entire world."

The Prince of Wales welcomed Prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah who came to London especially for the exhibition which demonstrates the value of the exhibition for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Prince Charles emphasized the spiritual aspect of this trip made by Muslims to Mecca every year which is reflected in the subtitle of the exhibition: "Journey to the Heart of Islam".

Prince Charles also took note of the twenty five thousand Muslims of the United Kingdom who go on Hajj every year which explains how it affects Muslims performing this ritual, and reflects the unity of the human race from all over the world through the continued pilgrimage over the centuries. He said, "The exhibition reflects the universality of the Hajj."

Prince Charles pointed out the remarkable collection

Prince Charles also pointed out, "like me, you will see that, by gathering together a remarkable collection of treasures from across the world, this exhibition brings to life the very human stories of the countless generations who have completed the Hajj through the ages - from Singapore to Istanbul, from Nanjing to Mombasa. Through the vivid images and artefacts on display, the exhibition reveals the truly universal character of the Hajj."

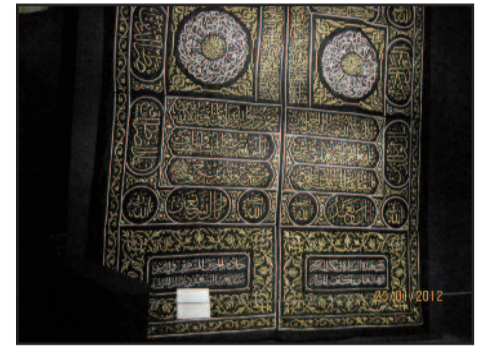
The Prince of Wales also offered special tribute to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz on the hospitality, saying: "I wanted to pay particular tribute, if I may, to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques who, in accordance with Islamic teaching, generously hosts Hajjis making the pilgrimage to Mecca, providing remarkable practical all facilities to them." Prince of Wales also mentioned, this recalls the hospitality shown to earlier pilgrims taking example from the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Islamic tradition dating back to the era of Abraham (peace be upon him) who built the Ka'aba.

Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz.

After the short ceremony, guests toured the exhibition enjoying all departments and watching a short film on pilgrimage.

Hajj: An epic journey

Let us see what is all about this Hajj Exhibition. Writing about this exhibition, Mr. Maev Kennedy, observed in The Guardian, "The exhibition, which opens on Thursday, is the first in any museum in the world to focus on the pilgrimage, which was already ancient when Muhammad completed his journey in the early



7th century. From 20,000 such travellers in 1932 in one week last year just under three million people undertook the Hajj." (The Guardian, 25 January 2012).

"From a few thousand people travelling by camel in the 7th century to three million a year today: The story of the Hajj - the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca - is an epic journey. That journey is celebrated in the first major exhibition dedicated to the Hajj, opening at the British Museum in London on January 26." (Catriona Davies for CNN, London, 26 January 2012)

"A pilgrimage is an epic human journey, a great assertion of life, community and ordinary people's courage," wrote Jonathan Jones in The Guardian and observed, "These pilgrims have come from Timbuktu across the Sahara, from Baghdad, and Caucasus, braving bandits and deserts to perform a duty that every Muslim should undertake at least once, if he or she is able." (The Guardian, 25 January, 2012).

Hajj: A Journey to the Heart of Islam brings together historic and contemporary objects to enable a global audience to deepen their understanding of the significance and history of the Hajj and the pilgrimage's importance for Muslims and looks at how it has evolved throughout history. "A clear understanding of Islam has become an urgent priority for the West," wrote Mr. Andrew Mckie in The Wall Street Journal and added, "And this may very well be the closest guide to experiencing one of its central rituals - and as the exhibition demonstrates, ideas of community, trade and shared knowledge - that any non-Muslim will be able to obtain, since the Hajj itself is reserved for the faithful." (The Wall Street Journal, 27 January 2012)

Hajj Exhibition will promote Message of peace Qaisra Khan, co-curator of the Exhibition, believes that the journey's message of peace will be promoted in the exhibition, particularly important because of the outside world's image of the Middle East in recent years with violence and upheaval. "If you look at the last five years, even the last 12 months, there is a lot about Islam and the Middle East in the press and it doesn't always get good press as we know.

"I think what the exhibition does is to talk about the one facet of Islam we don't know much about and that it's very much about peace."

Professor Nasser D. Khalili, whose foundation has lent many of the key exhibits for this show, hopes that it will emphasize what Islam has in common with other religious traditions. "I feel this exhibition really is, as it says, a journey: religious, spiritual, ritual and artistic," says Professor Khalili.

Dr. Venetia Porter, the curator for the exhibition, said, "The exhibition is about a journey and life-changing experience, a journey that has one purpose only - to reach the heart of Islam. We want people to understand what this experience has meant."

Karen Armstrong, a British author and commentator, writing in The Guardian, observed, "the British Museum's beautiful presentation of the Hajj can help us understand how the vast majority of the world's Muslims understand their faith." Ms. Armstrong hoped, "The new exhibition can indeed become a journey to the heart of Islam and also perhaps, to a more authentic and respectful western rational identity." (The Guardian, 22 January 2012)

Prince Charles also commended the British Museum and its partners, including H.S.B.C., for their vision and foresight in developing this exhibition and persuading so many distinguished collectors to lend their artefacts."

This exhibition- a source of education, of understanding, says Prince Charles

In the concluding part of his speech, Prince Charles said, "I can only pray, Insha Allah that this exhibition will be, for all who see it, a source of education, of understanding and of delight. It therefore gives me the greatest possible pleasure to declare the British Museum's Hajj Exhibition open."

Director of the British Museum

Mr. Neil McGregor, Director of the British Museum, spoke a few words on the objectives of the exhibition and its sections indicating the importance of the Hajj as the fifth pillar of Islam and the greatest phenomenon in the world which has a great impact in the lives of many people. Mr. McGregor said that the exhibition offers a look into the Hajj as a spiritual experience and explaining its logistics.

The Director of the British Museum thanked all those involved in providing artefacts to the exhibition, led by King Abdul Aziz Public Library and pointed to the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the service of pilgrims and hospitality accorded to them under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King