Material Images and Mental Ziyāra: Depicting the Prophet’s Grave in North African Devotional Books
(Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt)

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Abstract

The Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt (Guidelines to the Blessings) is a very popular book of prayers over the Prophet Muḥammad, originally written around the mid-fifteenth century by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465). The Dalāʾil is probably the only illustrated religious text in the Maghreb, where the image has been the subject of more profound reluctance than in the rest of the Muslim world. They show the sacred tomb of the Prophet inside the mosque of Medina, as well as his minbar, his mīhrāb and his sandals (naʿl), one of the most venerated relics in Islam. If the images in North African books have been systematically interpreted in a superficial way, this article proposes a reading at the crossroads of art history, codicology and a careful examination of the main text and the precious annotations added by the readers of some unpublished manuscripts. We will then understand that these illustrations have gradually acquired an autonomous place within the book. They act alongside the text, as memorial images of the sacred space hosting the holy body of the Prophet, and as a virtual substitute for the pilgrimage to Medina. It is in fact through this act, be it physical or virtual, that Muslims hope to visualize, in a dream, the figure of their loved one, Muḥammad.

Keywords


1 Introduction

The Kitāb Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt wa Shawāriq al-anwār fī ḏikr al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-Nabī al-mukhṭār ("Guidelines to the Blessings and the Enlightenment of Lights Giving the Saying of the Blessing Prayer Over the Chosen Prophet") is a popular prayer book written by the Moroccan Sufi Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465) around the mid-fifteenth century. The text consists of a compilation of litanies of prayers over the Prophet (tasliya), believed to convey blessings (baraka), protection and healing to whoever reads them consistently. Shortly after it was composed, it became one of the most popular devotional books in the Sunni world and was referred to as the “best-seller” of devotional literature. In fact, the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt circulated from Morocco to the
eastern Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa from the first half of the eleventh/seventeenth century onwards before it became extremely popular in the Mashriq, specifically in the Ottoman lands.

Apart from its extraordinary success, this book displays a very distinctive feature, as it is the only illustrated religious text in North Africa, a geo-cultural area known for its traditional aniconism. Indeed, in the preliminary part of the book, the author describes the Rawda, the funerary room in the mosque of Medina in which the Prophet Muhammad is buried together with the Caliphs Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. The presence of the description of the Prophet’s burial chamber in a book of tasliya (prayers and blessings over the Prophet Muhammad) is not surprising since its visitation occupies an eminently sacred place in Sunni Muslim piety. It is there that the holy body of Muhammad lies, before which every Muslim is urged to recite prayers in order to invoke his presence and to visualize him in a dream. This hope is all the more ardent among believers in the Muslim West, for whom the geographical distance from the holy places of the Hijaz makes this act less attainable.

This section of the text prompted North African artists and illuminators to insert a very simple schema of the tombs, through diagrammatic figures. The drawing of the Dalâ’il, which was most probably elaborated from the ninth/fifteenth century onwards in Morocco, subsequently gave rise to a rich iconography that is expressed in different ways according to the region where the text spread. For instance, Turkish copies of the Dalâ’il contain images of the holy shrines of Mecca and Medina, shown either in bird’s-eye view and depicted in a naturalistic way or in flat projection, a feature of representation that is most probably inspired by the iconography of pilgrimage books, such as the manuscripts of the Futūḥ al-Ḥaramayn (Revelations of the Two Sanctuaries) by Muhîyî al-Dîn Lârî (d. 933/1526) or the Anîs al-Ḥujjâj (A Pilgrim’s Companion) by Safî ibn Valî (fl. 11th/17th century).

However, in this paper, I would like to focus on the manuscript production of the Dalâ’il al-Khayrât in the Maghreb, as it is the region where the primitive and unprecedented iconography of the book emerged. Furthermore, the apparent simplicity of North African images in regard to the illustrations in Middle Eastern copies of the Dalâ’il led several historians of Islamic art to make the misleading assumption that their meaning and functions were self-evident and immediately graspable. They are often interpreted as a visual medium for the text that displays the positioning of the tombs inside the Rawda. In fact, the material examination of several unpublished copies of the Dalâ’il al-Khayrât produced in North Africa from the tenth/sixteenth through the thirteenth/nineteenth centuries and the analysis of a great amount of images, led me to consider them beyond their material and sensible form, as memorial and visionary illustrations. Since this material has never been approached from this perspective, I intend to explore the functions that could have been assigned to these images in the Muslim West. Indeed, the Dalâ’il’s illustrations selected for this study have been submitted to an iconographical analysis and a systematical decipherment of the annotations added by the readers of the book nearby them, suggesting that they either served as a setting for the meditation on the presence of the Prophet or were used to virtually project the reader to the holy funerary room of Muhammad. Moreover, I will question the reasons that led North African painters to use abstract ways of representation and to what extent they could have contributed to reinforcing the imaginative potential of these images as virtual pilgrimage substitutes for Maghribi readers.

Prior to discussing these two main ideas in this article, I will first introduce the text of the Dalâ’il al-Khayrât, its author al-Jazûlî, and the history of the prayer book’s emergence in fifteenth century-Morocco.
The Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt appeared in Morocco, at a time when the kingdom was undergoing profound socio-political and religious turmoil. Coastal towns were under threat of the political and economic penetration by Portuguese and Spanish forces; the central power (Makhzen) had weakened due to these attacks, but also because of internal power struggles between Marinid sultans and their viziers (r. 667–869/1269–1465), the Wattasids (r. 823–863/1420–1458); while the Moroccan people considered the political reaction of the kingdom’s rulers to be feeble and insufficient. The situation led to the emergence of a new leadership of figures whose religious and political authority were predicated on descent from the Prophet Muḥammad. They organized the jihad, the resistance against Portuguese occupation and the imperialism of the Makhzen in the zāwiya-s, originally Sufi order centres that they turned into political centres. Thousands of followers joined these brotherhoods and took part in the struggle. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465), the author of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt, became the most eminent of these leaders and is considered as a religious figure who had a determining influence on Morocco’s political and religious future.

He was born around the end of the fifteenth century in Southwestern Morocco, then decided to settle in Fes where he dedicated a few years to intense study. Besides reading books in the Qarawiyīn Library, he spent most of his days in a deep state of spiritual contraction (qabḍ) in his small room at Madrasat al-Ṣaffārīn. After his stay in Fes, he was initiated into the Shāḏiliyya order with a Sufi master at the ribāṭ of Tiṭ-n-Fiṭr and took part in the jihad against the Portuguese in Tangier in 841/1437. He left Morocco in 850/1446 and travelled to the Mashriq in order to perform the hajj, to Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina, where he is said to have visited the tomb of the Prophet several times. According to his biographers, before his return to Morocco, he stayed in Cairo for a brief period in order to complete his spiritual training with a master of the Qādiriyya at al-Azhar mosque. He returned to his homeland in 857/1453 and founded a new Sufi order, affiliated to the Shāḏiliyya, called the Jazūliyya, that gained an overwhelming popularity in a very short time. The fariqa was based on the intense veneration of the Prophet, the visit to his tomb, and the practice of ṭasliya, prayers and blessings over the Prophet Muhammad, mainly through the recitation of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt that he most probably wrote in 857/1453.

The text is part of a long tradition of devotional books made of blessings and prayers over the Prophet that were extremely successful, such as the Kitāb al-Shifā fi taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā (The Book of Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One), of the Qāḍī ‘Īyāḍ ibn Mūsā l-Yahṣūbī (d. 549/1149) or he Ḥiṣn al-Ḥaṣīn (The Fortified Fortress), by Muḥammad b. Muhammad b. Muḥammad al-Jazari (d. 833/1429–30). The main textual source for these texts, as well as for the Dalāʾil, is hadith literature, the Sayings about the benefits of the prayer over the Prophet. It is indeed believed to allow the devotee to call forth his presence, his intercession and to be granted his protective power or else to see him in a dream (and as a consequence, to effectively see him). This is precisely one of the purposes of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt, as expressed in its first chapter called Faṣl fi Faḍl al-Ṣalāt ʿalā l-Nabi (Chapter on the Benefits of Invoking Prayers over the Prophet) and dedicated to the virtues and the benefits of the prayer over the Prophet. It is followed by the section of the Prophet’s 201 names and epithets, and the description of his grave in Medina (Ṣifat al-Rawḍa al-Mubāraka). This is the specific section that occasioned the addition of a schematic drawing showing the tombs of these three figures. The third part of the book, entitled Kayfiyyat al-Ṣalāt ʿalā l-Nabi (The Means of Invoking Prayers over the Prophet), is the main body of the text as it is formed out of the
blessing prayers and invocations gathered by al-Jazuli. The prayers are divided into eight sections, or ḥzāb, meant to be read each day of the week, and twice on Monday (Monday being privileged probably because the Prophet is said to be born on Monday). However, starting from the tenth/sixteenth century onwards, most of the manuscripts displayed concomitantly another form of division as the prayers were divided into quarters (rub’), thirds (thulth) and a half (nisf). A final prayer in verse concludes the book.

3   An Illustrated Prayer Book in the Muslim West

As I mentioned earlier, in the preliminary part of the book, and immediately after the Names of the Prophet, al-Jazuli announces a schema of the tombs of the Prophet and the two Caliphs in the Mosque of Medina, as follows (fig. 1):

*This is the description of the Blessed Rawda in which the Messenger of God is buried, together with his two companions, Abū Bakr and 'Umar.*

Before pursuing, it seems crucial to consider the meaning of the “Rawda” and the space to which it corresponds since several significations are assigned to this word in Arabic literature. Its first literal meaning is “the garden,” or else, as clarified by Ibn Manẓūr in the *Lisān al-ʿArab,* “a land that is located in a peaceful place with trees, flowers and streams.” According to the commentator of the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt,* Muḥammad al-Fāsī (d. 1109/1698), this significance is closely related to the conception of light and serenity that the Muslim imaginary associates with the funerary room of the Prophet.

Furthermore, the space of the funerary room of the Prophet, or the Rawda al-nabawīya itself, as described in religious and historical literature dedicated to the Mosque of Medina, gives rise to certain spatial ambiguities. The word can either refer to the restricted space that welcomes the Prophet’s tomb or to the entire edifice of the tomb chamber in which the Prophet and his Companions are buried. However, according to several hadiths, the Rawda is the area that extends from the southern gallery of the mosque, to the tomb of the Prophet in the east, which is the space located between the tomb and the minbar of the Prophet. This geographical location distinguishes between the mortuary chamber of the Prophet, called “al-ḥujra,” and the Rawda: “the place where the Prophet used to stand” – that is, the “ground” located “between the grave and the minbar.” This conception is the most commonly accepted among authors, such as the traveller Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) who visited the Mosque of Medina in 580/1184 and prayed in “the ‘Garden', the space that extends from the holy tomb to the pulpit [minbar].” Curiously, in the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt,* al-Jazuli seems to restrict what he calls “Rawda” to the funerary room where the tombs are located and not to the wider area that extends from the tomb to the minbar.

Hence, the author describes the Rawda as follows:

*This is the description of the Blessed Rawda in which the Messenger of God is buried, together with his two companions, Abū Bakr and 'Umar.*

In most manuscripts, this descriptive section is followed by a schema in which three tombs in elevation are presented: the tomb of the Prophet laying at the top, the tomb of Abū Bakr, lower and slightly shifted towards the left and, the tomb of ‘Umar at the bottom (figs. 2, 3). As al-Jazuli underlines, this arrangement refers to the hadith of the faqih of Medina and Abū Bakr’s grandson, ‘Urwah b. Zubayr (643–711 or 712), who composed
Thus, is related by ‘Urwah Ibn al-Zubayr: “The Messenger of God was buried in the alcove (al-sawha). Abū Bakr was buried behind the Messenger of God and ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was buried near the feet of Abū Bakr. The eastern alcove has remained empty, and in it, is said, but God knows best, that ‘Īsā b. Maryam is buried there.”

This account transmitted by ‘Urwah refers to the premonition of ‘Ā’isha, Abū Bakr’s daughter and the Prophet’s wife, of the future burying of the body of the Prophet and his two Companions’ inside the “chamber” of ‘Ā’isha. Indeed, both Caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar will be, according to the predicting dream, buried by the Prophet’s side.

When looking at the images of the Dalā’il, one may notice that they are not a reproduction of what is visible to the human eye inside the Mosque of Medina. Instead of employing linear and aerial perspective, the painter depicts each element of the iconography in flat projection, without any volume or projected shadow (figs. 2, 3). Rather, every element is placed on a single plane without any differentiation between them and no reduction in size or color to indicate depth or distance in the painting.

These images recall the representations of the pilgrimage sanctuaries of the Ḥijāz that proliferated in the Ayyubid and Seljuk Hajj certificates from the end of the sixth/twelfth century and in Ottoman pilgrimage guides from the tenth/sixteenth century. In these images, the painters show the shrine of Medina by superimposing an interior view of the prayer hall and the Rawḍa of the Prophet on the one hand and, on the other hand, a panoramic view of the monument with its courtyard, its portico, its doors, and its minarets. The three tombs of the Prophet and his Companions are represented in the shape of superimposed rectangles, each identified by captions (ṣifat qabr). They are enclosed in the pentagonal wall of the Rawḍa added by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Azīz (d. 101/720) in 88/707, during the Umayyad reign of al-Walīd I (r. 86–96/705–15). The funerary chamber is bordered at the top with a series of lamps placed from each side of a central lamp, the one that would actually be suspended in the mihrab arch or under the dome that precedes it, as J. Sourdil-Thomine and D. Sourdil-Thomine point out.
minbar appears in the simplified form of a pulpit with two or even three degrees. In the courtyard of the mosque, a portico and the “palms of the sanctuary of Medina” (nakhl ḥarām al-Madīna) are drawn on either side of a dome, called the “dome of oil” (qubbat al-zayt) where the material necessary for the functioning of the mosque was stored.

However, the particularity of the Dalāʾīl’s images lies in the choice of an extremely close-up view of the tombs alone and not of the monument as a whole, thus establishing an intimate relationship between the observer and the body of the Prophet and the objects related to him. Despite the simplification and the abstraction of the figures, the evoked place is recognisable. Enclosed in a square or a rectangular decorated frame, the tombs are in a rectangular shape and placed one on top of the other; they are colored in gold or with yellow ink and identified by a caption written in maghribī or thuluth script.

A monumental arch was added to enhance the sacred space; and it is the most decorated element of the iconography. Indeed, according to the creativity of the painter, it can be a simple semi-circular arch, a pointed arch, a horseshoe arch or a multifoil arch while complex vegetal arabesques or geometric designs in gold fill the spandrels. The most elaborated versions of this composition include a wide lamp that illuminates the empty scene, and painted in gold or yellow, similarly to the tombs. The color palette of these images is made of very strong and vivid hues but always limited to three or four colors. This composition of the funerary room remains almost unchanged or is subjected to very slight variations depending on the personal choices and imagination of the artist.

Despite this stylistic conservatism, an iconographic innovation will be introduced as soon as the first half of the seventeenth century, as we will see in the following lines.

4 Beyond the Text: Iconology of Cult Image

4.1 “A Garden among the Gardens of Paradise”: Topography of a Sacred Space
Indeed, the single image of the three tombs was enriched by a second illustration, depicting the minbar, the pulpit of the Prophet and his prayer niche (the miḥrāb) in the
Mosque of Medina, forming a double image symmetrically arranged on either side of a vertical axis (figs. 4, 5).

This addition is quite surprising since the minbar and the miḥrāb of the Prophet introduced in this composition are not mentioned in the descriptive introduction to the images. We could possibly interpret these elements as an additional visual medium to strengthen the evocation of the Prophet or to facilitate the spatial recollection of the Mosque of Medina.

Nevertheless, the answer might be found in a few copies that display this new iconography in which the motif of the minbar is accompanied by the following inscription: "mā bayna qabrī wa minbarī, rawḍaton min riyāḍī l-jannah wa minbarī ʿalā ḥawḍī" (Whatever is between my grave and my pulpit, is one of the gardens of Paradise, and my pulpit is by my basin) (fig. 6).

As was suggested by Jan Just Witkam, this inscription refers to Sayings of the Prophet reported by several traditionists such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) in his Musnad or al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), according to which the space located between the tomb and the minbar of Muḥammad is similar to one of the gardens of Paradise. Moreover, the Prophet himself used to stand in this exact place in the mosque while performing his daily prayers. Hence, any prayer accomplished by the pilgrims in this highly sacred space of the mosque, has a specific value since whoever would stand there would find himself in one of the Gardens of Paradise (rawḍa min riyāḍī l-jannah) or, at least, would ardently want to reach it (raghghabahu f ī ḏalika). The elevated meaning of this Saying could be linked to an eschatological concept, as pointed out by J.J. Witkam in his article on the Dalāʾil: the basin is defined in hadith literature as the basin of Paradise, that is the meeting place on the Day of Resurrection (inna minbarī ʿalā ḥawḍī, “my pulpit is on the edge of my basin [in Paradise].”) In other words, the addition of the drawing of the minbar completes the illustration of the Rawḍa in its broader sense, as it reconstitutes, through this double page, the sacred space as described and defined by the Prophet.

4.2 A Mental Ziyāra? Towards an Ideal Pilgrimage

In order to do so, the chosen viewpoint to depict this space, plays a crucial role. Indeed, in these manuscripts – and contrary to the Oriental images mentioned earlier – the schema offers an extremely narrow and intimate view on the tombs rather than a global vision of the monument in its entirety. By doing so, the illustration establishes an intimate relation between the viewer and the body of the Prophet and the objects that belonged to him. Moreover, by offering this privileged view, the schema does not accurately reflect the real physical experience of the pilgrim during the ziyāra, the visit to the Prophet’s grave. As a matter of fact, the visitor cannot have access to

Figure 4
MSS 12331, 1357/1647, Morocco, al-Ḥassaniya Royal Library, ff. 28b–29a
the three graves, which are protected by metal railings and reinforced by a stone wall. The traveller Ibn Jubayr provides a detailed description of the pilgrimage rituals when visiting the graves:

*On the wall facing toward Mecca (qibla) [of the funerary room], there is a silver nail opposite the face of the Prophet to mark his venerated visage, and people stand in front of it to say their greetings. At his feet is the head of Abū Bakr the Just, and the head of 'Umar touches the shoulders of Abū Bakr the Just. For the greeting you stand with your back to the direction of prayer and facing toward Muhammad. The greeting made, your turn toward your right toward Abū Bakr and then toward 'Umar.*

The silver nail mentioned by Ibn Jubayr is situated on the southern wall in front of which stand the pilgrims: it indicates the place of the inaccessible grave of the Prophet. Below the nail, are three little holes pierced in the wall, facing each grave. By introducing the viewer’s eye inside the holy tomb chamber, the images do not reproduce the *souvenir* of what the pilgrims could have seen or what they are allowed to see in Medina.
As a matter of fact, and as underlined by Louis Massignon, the Dalāʾīl’s image “takes the reader of the Dalāʾīl on an ideal pilgrimage”, an ideal gaze upon the grave of the Prophet.

These observations lead us to question the many possible functions of these images: beyond offering a visual description of the Rawḍa, accompanying its written description, were they made to project the reader and viewer in the sacred space of the Rawḍa? Several manuscripts substantiate the hypothesis that the images act as a frame for a virtual ziyāra of the Prophet’s Rawḍa in Medina. Indeed, a few unpublished manuscripts kept in Moroccan libraries bear a poem in praise of the Prophet and his Rawḍa, written in the margins of the illustrations (fig. 7):

Peace upon the tomb visited from afar. Peace upon the burial chamber and within it the Prophet. Peace upon the night visitor of his Lord. May he have access to all that he desires. Peace upon the one who asked the lizard. “Who am I?” and to whom the lizard answered: “Thou art the Messenger, Muḥammad.” Praise to him who is buried in a pure land [Medina]. And to whom the Clement gave glory and lustre. Blessed is the visitor to the tomb of Muḥammad. O thou on thy mount, riding the way of Medina, send my greetings to my beloved Muḥammad. In his sweet Rawḍa are my desire, my wish, the healing of my heart and soul and my rest. But if the Rawḍa seemed far to me and her visit seemed difficult, then her representation would be for me the best of images. I guide the eyes of my memory inside the Rawḍa consoling my spirit, my secret and my restless soul. Here I am O Pole of all worlds, Muḥammad, I embrace the Rawḍa ardently with a prayer that would erase all our faults.

After conveying blessings upon the Prophet and his tomb, the poem urges the reader to visit the tomb of Muḥammad (ziyāra) buried in the "pure land" of Medina (al-madfūn fī arḍin ṭayyibah). In the last section of the poem, which appears to be the most significant part, the author reassures those who are unable to travel to Medina – and invites them to accomplish a mental visit, by gazing at the drawing and by reconstructing a mental image of the Rawḍa (timṯāluha) because – he justifies – “its image [in the mind] is the most pleasant and serene image.” The text continues by praising the process of recollection of the sacred space (I guide the eye of my memory inside the Rawḍa) through the contemplation of the drawing simultaneously with the recitation of the prayers over the Prophet. In sum, by expressing a clear invitation to accomplish a mental journey to the Rawḍa, this poem seals one of the meanings of this double image; which is a reconstitution of a portable sacred space.

This idea is also found in a late copy of the Dalāʾīl produced in Tunisia in the early twentieth century and kept today in the Museum of Islamic Art of Raqqāda (fig. 8).
inscription was added – probably by the owner of the manuscript – immediately after the descriptive text of the Rawḍa and prior to the images:

Here is the benefit of introducing the image (fā’idat waḍʿ sifat al-rawḍa): its depiction is intended for he who didn’t have the opportunity to visit the holy Rawḍa. May he who wrote these verses about the importance of the representation of the Rawḍa be protected. Here is what he himself says: “If the eagerness to see the Rawḍa became unbearable and if it was impossible to visit it, then I will trace its shape on the palm of my hand and would ask to whoever visited it to invoke the prayers over the Prophet (tasliya).”

These texts are clearly indicative of the importance of the zāyāra to the Prophet’s grave in Medina as a practice related to the devotion of the Prophet. Indeed, according to several hadiths, the prayers that are directed towards him, facing his ḥujra, can increase the chances of being heard by him and could bestow his intercession to the devotee.37 But they also nourish the hope for the pilgrim to be granted with a luminous vision of the Chosen One (ruʾyat al-Nabī) or to see him in a dream. One must point out that to the Saying of the Prophet, “Whoever sees [him] in a dream, has really seen [him].”38

On the other hand, these texts evoke the probable “inability” or the complexity of undertaking a pilgrimage to the Prophet’s grave in Medina for North African pilgrims.39 Indeed, the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina was not exempt of dangers. Not only the geographical distance, but also the cost of the journey made it accessible only for a few privileged people who could afford it. Moreover, caravans of Maghribi pilgrims could face several risks, particularly during times of instability. This was the case, for instance, throughout the ninth/fifteenth and the tenth/sixteenth centuries, during which the sea routes and the overland routes to Mecca and Medina were extremely risky or sometimes impossible for North Africans pilgrims due to the political turmoil caused by the Christian offensives, the acts of piracy in the Mediterranean sea and the Ottoman expansion in the Maghrib. These specific reasons have often prompted Mālikī jurists...
to produce *fatwas* that justify a region dispensation or prohibit Muslims in the Islamic West to perform the *hajj* to Mecca and Medina, in particular from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.40

It is thus possible to suggest the hypothesis that the images of the *Dalāʾil* have been occasionally employed as a form of substitute to the *ziyāra* to the Prophet’s grave, as a medium for the stimulation of the mental visualisation of the sacred space and, through it, the vision of the Prophet.

5 Visualizing the Prophet

5.1 Muhammadan Praesentia

The poem in praise of the Rawḍa and the written inscriptions occasionally added near the images I mentioned earlier seem to suggest that the reading of the prayers of the *Dalāʾil* together with the contemplation of the grave, the lamp, the minbar and the *miḥrāb* would allow the reader to have access to the presence of the Prophet. Moreover, the choice of representing his grave is significant. Indeed, the veneration of the tomb of the Prophet occupies a prominent place in Muslim piety and consciousness, and sometimes defies the condemnations of rigorist theologians such as the Ḥanbali theologian and jurisconsult Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) during the eighth/fourteenth century or those of the Wahhabis starting from the twelfth/eighteenth century.41 In the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, al-Jazūlī himself recalls the specific importance of praying over the tomb of the Prophet: “Pray over his tomb among the tombs!”

Several accounts describe mystical experiences that occurred to certain pilgrims to Medina and those who directed prayers towards Muḥammad, facing his *huṣra*.42 In his compilation of prophetic traditions entitled *al-Sunan*, the traditionist ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī (d. 255/869) tells the story of Saʿīd b. al-Muṣayyib (d. 94/712–3)43 who was locked during three days near the *huṣra* of the Prophet at the time of the events of al-Ḥarra in 63/683 during which the call to prayer was not recited. He was only informed of the prayer time by a whisper originating from the tomb.44

The representation of the Prophet’s figure through the *taṣliya* and the visit of the Prophet is extremely present in the writings of the Sufi ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1409) who related his own experience of a visionary dream that happened in front of the *huṣra* of the Prophet in Medina in 1400.45 In a section of his treatise entitled *Qāb Qawsayn*,46 he insists on the importance of the veneration of the tomb of the Prophet and the mental visualization of the latter:

"One must persistently keep in mind its visible shape, as it was previously described, by observing the rules of decency and by showing veneration, deference and reverent fear. And if you cannot imagine mentally its form as it was described, and if you saw it during your sleep, then visualize it according to the shape you saw during your sleep; and if you never saw it during your sleep and if you were never able to visualize it according to the form previously described, mention him [the Prophet] and recite the *taṣliya*, and act as if you were present near him in his lifetime, with deference [respect], veneration and reverent fear, because he sees you and he hears you every time you mention him. [...] And if you cannot stand in his presence and if you were able to visit his noble grave, to see the Rawḍa and the dome, you must call forth the image of his tomb and every time you mention him and you direct your prayers towards him, do it as if you were standing in front of his tomb with veneration and respect until you perceive his spiritual presence [rūḥāniyyatuḥu]. And if you
never visited his tomb not seen the Rawda, recite continuously the prayer over him an imagine him listening to you, with respect and concentration so that your prayer reaches him.Indeed, a tasliya recited nearby the tomb of the Prophet could allow the devotee to reach the "spiritual presence" of Muhammad, or would provoke a vision of the Prophet (ru'yat al-Nabī). Besides conveying an architectural description of the interior of the mosque, the images of the Dalā'il also seem to provide several signs of the Prophetic presence, even though he is not being explicitly depicted. Indeed, each element of the Dalā'il iconography is intended as an attribute of the Prophet. Hence, if we consider the minbar of the Prophet, one must know that it is considered as a relic of the Prophet endowed with his baraka. Ibn Jubayr describes the rituals of the pilgrims that he observed during his sojourn in Medina in 580/1184: "The people enter their hands to reach it [the minbar] and rub their skin against its steps, seeking for the baraka [blessing] we receive by touching its venerated seat." By extension, its addition in the images of the Dalā'il aims to prolong or to "perpetuate the souvenir of the Prophet, sitting on his preaching chair and speaking to his disciples or welcoming his messengers." In a similar manner, if the commonly accepted function of the mihrāb is to indicate the direction that should be faced during the prayer on a qibla wall of a mosque, its depiction might be a symbol of the "Prophet presence." Indeed, as argued by certain Art Historians, such as Lucien Golvin, the mihrāb (prayer niche) does not necessarily assume a functional role inasmuch as the indication of the direction of Mecca is beforehand established by the qibla wall. Moreover, the very rich decoration to which the mihrāb is systematically subjected to in a mosque consolidates the idea according to which its importance is first of all symbolic. Although these readings must be manipulated with prudence and measure, they seem to be particularly echoed in the images of the Dalā'il. As for the motif of the lamp that can seem at first sight, anodyne, ornamental, or simply meant to suggest the architecture of the place of worship, the captions that are often added on to it, leave no doubt to its meaning.
In the text of the Dalāʾil, al-Jazūlī refers several times to the “light” and links it to the figure of the Prophet. In some passages of the text, he compares the light of Muḥammad to a “shiny lamp” (al-sirāj al-munīr) that is transmitted by God (wa nūran ‘alā nūrihi alladī minhu khalaqta hu) through his Messenger. From this light supposedly “all the great lights” originated and his “secret torch” “illuminated all great secrets” (Muḥammad alladī nūruhu mīn nūri al-anwār wa ashraqa bi-shuʿāʾi sirrihi al-asrār). Yet, in the images of the Dalāʾil, the idea of light is evoked by several mediums that can be written or depicted: the light takes the shape of a monumental yellow or golden lamp or a golden halo, and they are identified by the following captions: the “crystal” (mishkaw āt), the “glittering star” (al-kawkab al-durrī) or the “shining lamp” (sir āj munīr) (fig. 9). In fact, these terms refer to the concept of “light of Muḥammad” or nūr muḥammadī that originates in the Light Verse in the Quran (Q 24:35), in which the Prophet is assimilated to a torch in a glass:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. A parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp – the lamp is in a glass (mishkawāt), the glass as it were a glittering star (kawkab durrī) – lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whomever He wishes. Allah draws parables for mankind, and Allah has knowledge of all things.54

This verse occupies an eminent place in the devotion of the Prophet as it recalls its exceptional rank. As a consequence, several interpretations have been elaborated essentially within Sufi circles.55 Chief among them, the tafsīr of the mystic Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767)56 who defines the Prophet as the symbol of the light transmitted by God in order to shine on the Earth and to guide his community to the divine origins of his Light.57 The Iraqi Jaʿfar Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) develops the idea according to which the Light of Muḥammad (nūr muḥammadī) has its origins in the creation of Adam and the begetting of mankind.58 It is important to note that these references to the Light Verse are extremely present in Islamic artefacts, specifically in miniatures produced in Persian lands.59 Representations of the Prophet flourished between the eighth/fourteenth and the tenth/sixteenth centuries in Ilkhanid (1256–1353), Timurid (1370–1506) and Safavid (1501–1722) paintings, particularly in the copies of the Miʿrājnamah dedicated to the heavenly Ascension of the Prophet (Miʿrāj).60 He is then regularly depicted with his attributes such as the flaming golden halo around his head, as a reference to his primordial and creative Light.61

This passage from the Light Verse can also be found in Ottoman copies of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt, in which a cupola adorned with flames covers the tomb chamber of the Prophet.62 It is the case of the Turkish copy MSS 463 from the Chester Beatty Library composed in 1213/1798, in which the complete “Verse of Light” is inscribed on top of the flames rising from the cupola covering the graves and the lamp.63 According to Louis Massignon, the lamp is the “fundamental element” of the image of the Rawḍa as it represents the “promise of the divine assistance for those who keep a vigil and pray at the tombs of the deceased.”64 In other words, the lamp and every pattern referring to the light form an ensemble of signs of the divine presence not only for the deceased, but also for those who come and pray at their tombs.

5.2 The Sandal of the Prophet (al-naʿl al-Nabawwi): An Image-Relic

Hence, by enriching the primitive image of the Dalāʾil with new iconographical patterns, the artists were most likely informed by a desire to multiply the attributes to the Prophet, and thus purposefully transcended the textual limitations fixed by al-Jazūlī. It
is probably for a similar reason that the images of the Prophet’s sandals were added in a good number of manuscripts. Indeed, the depiction of the sandals is introduced from the second half of the eleventh/seventeenth century, even though it is not related to any specific passage in the text (figs. 10–12).65

The sandals of the Prophet are among the most popular relics in Islam, and they were particularly venerated during the Middle Ages due to the blessings they are believed to bestow.66 The oldest account that testifies to this cult goes back to the ‘Abbasid period when the Caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–85) received the sandals of the Prophet from one of his subjects.67 They are mentioned two centuries later, in the tenth century, in Hebron where they are said to be kept by the imam of the mosque.68 The later references remain scattered until the first half of the twelfth century, period during which the cult of the Prophet flourished in a more pronounced manner.69 The Ayyubid Sultan of Damascus, al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsā (r. 1229–37) decided to display the sandal at the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, a college for the teaching of the hadith traditions that he built. Hence, the believers were able to come in order to engage in private prayer near the sandal and seek its blessings and those of the Prophet (yatabarrakūna bihi).70

In the Faṭḥ al-Mutaʿāl fī Madḥ al-nīʿāl, a compilation of descriptions, drawings and poems on the sandal of the Prophet by the seventeenth-century historian Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqarrī (d. 1631), informs us that North African and Andalusi scholars travelled regularly to Damascus, from the twelfth century onwards, in order to see the sandal and to reproduce its exact replica on paper.71 Since then, images of the relic started to circulate in the Islamic West, essentially among devotees who were not able to travel to the Mashriq.72 These replicas were believed to be endowed with therapeutic and healing qualities similar to those of the sandal itself. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 686/1287), the Damascene scholar specialized in hadiths, mentions the accounts of a certain Shaykh called Abū Jaʿfar Āḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Majīd who underlines the miraculous blessings of the sandal’s replicas:

_I cut the pattern [of this sandal] for one of my students. [He came to me one day] and said: ‘Yesterday, I witnessed a wonder from the baraka of this sandal. My wife was_
suffering from a pain, which almost took her life. I placed the [image of the] sandal on the painful spot and said: O God, show me the blessing (baraka) of the owner of this sandal. God cured her instantly.\textsuperscript{73}

Similar apotropaic beliefs and devotional practices existed in the Maghrib as well, during the tenth/sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{74} They were particularly vivid in Morocco as suggested by a \textit{fatwa} of the well-known Mālikī jurist Āhmad b. Yaḥyā l-Wansharīsī (d. 914/1508) condemning certain forms of devotion of the Prophet, such as the veneration of his sandals.\textsuperscript{75}

In general, the relic as a “trace” or sacred human remains, forms “a repository of the individual and collective memory” of this sacred figure.\textsuperscript{76} Hence, the replica of the sandal in the \textit{Dalāʾīl}, beyond its talismanic function, actually revives the \textit{souvenir} of the Prophet and establishes an intimate link between the pious and the venerated figure. In addition, it is recommended to whoever would yearn to see the Prophet in a dream, to carry the pattern of the sandal during the visit of the \textit{Rawḍa} in Medina.\textsuperscript{77}

Indeed, the inscriptions running inside and through the outline of the pattern in the \textit{Dalāʾīl al-Khayrāt} are quite indicative of the sacredness attached to the replicas of the sandals and to their active contemplation (\textit{figs. 11–12}). It says: “I rub the whiteness of my face against the sandal, because the Prophet himself used to place it in front of him. It is certainly not a sign of love for the sandal, but for he who wore it.”\textsuperscript{78} At the bottom of the sandal, the inscription says that the “shape [of the pattern] is as noble as the sandal itself” (\textit{wa dawruha akram biha min naʿl}), which underlines the substitutive role of the images.

In a copy housed at the Library of Oriental Studies in Paris (fig. MS 220), a double leaf has been inserted at the end of the book (\textit{fig. 12}).

It might have been used independently from the rest of the text as a talismanic image. This phenomenon can affect the images of the graves and the minbar as well. Indeed, a few manuscripts from the al-Ḥassaniya Royal Library of Morocco\textsuperscript{79} display distinct traces of rips at the habitual location of the illustrations. Hence, these missing images have probably been removed in order to be used as amulets. In opposite cases, the copies 8817 (mid-12th/18th century) from the Ḥassaniya Royal Library (\textit{fig. 13}) and \textit{Arabe 1180} (10/16th century) from the French National Library (\textit{fig. 14}) were initially not illustrated before their owner intercalated leaves containing images probably removed from another manuscript. This phenomenon reveals that the images are often not simply dependent on the text and in some cases can even operate and be used entirely independently. In this regard, the images are indeed used for their apotropaic and therapeutic merits, as they bear the healing power of the Prophet and his blessings.
6 Conclusion

In conclusion, no matter what the initial purpose of the unique image was throughout the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries and what its function was within the book, its later developments proceed from the intention of the painters and the users of the book to grasp the broader sense of the Rawda, as defined by the Sayings of the Prophet, and to adapt the book to their own uses and needs. Hence, the addition of the minbar and miḥrāb images complete the vocation of the tasliya by conveying to the devotee not only a perceptible frame in order to imagine the Rawda in Medina, but also replicas of the Prophet’s relics endowed with his baraka. This probably explains why the painters often transcended the initial model by enriching the iconographic program with new patterns associated to the Prophet, and reinforcing its evocation and its presence.

In order to reach this aim, painters do not depict what is visible to the human eye. Indeed, contrary to the Middle Eastern images of the Dalāʾīl, North African representations display a strong semantic value as they function through a combination of simple yet distinguishable features of the monument, in order to make it immediately identifiable. Only three tombs indicate the funerary room of Medina; the hanging lamp inside a niche is a classic formula used to evoke a mosque in Islamic art; the minbar is easily recognizable through its three steps, its seat and the miḥrāb, its codified form, and therefore, immediately identifiable. These signs impose a visual and a mnemonic path between every component of the image while the occasional presence of written indications on the utilisation of the images, provoke a psychic effort to recollect the holy place.

Moreover, the use of very basic and archaic pictorial techniques makes sense in devotional images in general, in order to ensure the instant effectiveness of their message. The absence of “optical naturalism” is indeed to be understood as a purposeful decision of the artists in an attempt to evoke a sacred idea or a figure that goes beyond the physical world. Henceforth, what is shown is not restricted by either spatial or temporal limitations of the classical mimesis. Rather, the image reflects a vision that encompasses the terrestrial and eschatological space of the Rawda as described in the hadith, and at the same time provides the signs of the presence of Muhammad as the Intercessor. Hence, abstraction and schematization seem to be the ideal compromise when the “signified” is so transcendental that it cannot be effectively depicted.

In this regard, the role of the illuminated decoration in the manuscripts of the Dalāʾīl should not be overlooked: indeed, the copies of the prayer book stand out from the rest of non-Quranic religious books by the presence of an abundant illumination throughout the pages, in gold and bright colors. The decoration is particularly rich and elaborated around the descriptive text that precedes the illustrations and is expressed through the same combination of colors as those of the images. Hence, the illumination stimulates the senses by delighting the eye and gradually guides and introduces the gaze of the viewer into the images, and by doing so, allies aesthetic and religious experiences.

Indeed, it is important to note that the reader, in a deep state of prayer, leafs through the pages of the handbook until his eyes fall upon the images that allow him to reach, through an ideal view, one of the most sacred places, where the body of the Prophet lies. We can then hypothesize that he/she enters into a state of contemplation through which everything becomes possible, including reaching the Chosen One.
Bibliography

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Reference Works


Notes


3 The city of Medina itself is considered as a "city-relic" filled with the blessings of the Prophet's body and is thereby believed to convey hope, intercession, and healing to whoever sets foot on its soil. Gril, Denis, "Le corps du Prophète," REMMM, 113–14, 2006, p. 45; Schimmel, Annemarie (1985), And Muhammad is His Messenger. The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina, pp. 189 and 243.


5 The Anis al-Hajjāj is a treatise on the pilgrimage composed by Saḥ ibn Vāli on 12 Rājāb 1087/20 September 1676. The author recorded his pilgrim's journey over sea from Surat to Mocha and Jedda performed ca. 1677–80 and provides advice on the performance of the pilgrimage written in a poetic form. In the same way as Futūḥ al-Haramayn, this text has given rise to the development of rich iconographic cycles related to the places of pilgrimage that can be found in two copies; one is in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (MSS 1325) and the other in the CSMMV Mumbai. See Rogers, Michael (2003). The Arts of Islam: Masterpieces from the Khalilli Collection. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.; Porter, Venetia (ed.), Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 39; Leach, Linda York (1998). Paintings from India (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, 8), Oxford: Khalili Collections, pp. 144–5.

6 The Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt might have spread to the Mashriq through the Ottoman provinces in North Africa. The oldest known and dated Turkish copy of the text was produced some time before 1097/1685 in Turkey by Muṣṭafa Eyyubi Efendi and is nowdays kept in a private collection. However, the text was most probably known and produced before that date. Soon after the end of the eleventh/seventeenth century, the manuscripts of the prayer book disseminated in the Middle East, from the Ottoman lands to South East Asia as well as the Indian Subcontinent. Most of the earliest Middle Eastern copies reproduce the same composition that was developed in the Maghrib, with a close-up view on the tomb of the Prophet through schematic forms. However, they soon introduce an iconographical innovation by integrating a panoramic view image of the sanctuary of Mecca facing that of Medina. Depending on the manuscripts, the images are either represented through a bird's-eye view and depicted in a naturalistic way or in flat projection. For a detailed explanation and chronology of this shifting as well as illustrations, see Abid, Hiba, Les Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt d'al-Jazūlī (m. 869/1465): la tradition manuscrite d'un livre de prières soufi au Maghreb du X/XVIe au XIIIe/XIXe siècles (unpublished PhD diss. Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2017), pp. 331–7. Several studies were dedicated to the illustrated manuscripts of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt produced in the Mashriq. For a general introduction to the iconography of the Dalāʾil and the shifting illustration program in the Mashriq, see Jan Just Witkam, "The battle of images: Mecca vs. Medina in the iconography of the manuscripts of al-Jazālī's Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt," in Theoretical Approaches to the Transmission and Edition of Oriental Manuscripts: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Istanbul March 28–30, 2001, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Manfred Kropp, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007, pp. 67–82, pp. 295–300 (illustrations). For a comprehensive study of the history of the Dalāʾil in the late Ottoman Empire and their iconography, see Sabīha Göğüş, Depicting the Holy: Representations of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem in the Late Ottoman Empire (unpublished PhD diss. Koç University, 2008).


It is said that 12665 new followers joined the ʿārḍa of al-Jazūlī from 857/1453 to 869/1465. Muhammad al-Mahdī al-Fāsī (d. 1109/1698) was born in an Andalusian family originally from Malaga who settled in Fes starting from 880/1475. He grew up in a wealthy milieu close to the Alawi central power and to the Sufi circles. His privileged situation allowed him to devote most of his time to writing texts related to the history of Sufism and biographies of saints. In Cornell, pp. 157–8.


Bukhari (Al-), p. 138.


Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr al-Kinānī (d. 614/1217) is a traveller from al-Andalus who wrote a chronicle describing his pilgrimage to the Ḥijāz that he carried out from 579/1183 to 581/1185.


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352 Abid
349 Bukhari (Al-), Muhammad b. Isma’il, Title 24, Chapter 12.
347 Jubayr, Muhammad b. Ahmad, pp. 220–1.
345 This verse refers to a legend according to which a green lizard confirmed to the Prophet that he was the Messenger of God (Al-salām ‘alayka yā nabi Muḥammad, yā rasūl Allāh!). In Knappert, Jan (1971). Swahili Islamic Poetry, Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, p. 35. Several miracles of this type that occurred to the Prophet, involving talking camels, gazelles or wolves and recognizing God’s Envoy, are recounted in Abu Nawāw. Hyderab. Dīvān al-Maʿārif, pp. 324–31.
343 Jubair, Muhammad b. Ahmad, pp. 220–1.
342 This belief derives in particular from the hadith: “Whoever has seen me, has seen me in reality, for Satan does not take my appearance”. In Amri, Nelly (2008). Les saints en Islam. Les messagers de l’espérance. Sainteté et eschatologie au Maghreb aux XIVe–XVe siècles, Paris: Cerf, pp. 209 and 141.
340 Schimmel, A., p. 17.
338 Sa’id b. al-Muṣayyib (d. 712–3) is one of the foremost fuqāḥā’ of Medina, among the saḥāba.
331 Jubayr, Muhammad b. Ahmad, pp. 220–1.
328 The Qāb Qawsayn is one of the forty treatises contained in the compendium Nāmūs al-aʿẓām attributed to al-Jīlī. Addas, p. 119.
327 Addas, pp. 136–7.


“The light which is said to be like ‘a niche with a lamp in a glass’ refers to the light of the Prophet while he was in his father’s loins,” in Addas, p. 35.

This verse is regularly inscribed on mosque lamps. As an example, see the Egyptian and Syrian lamps of the Mamluk period produced in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, preserved in the Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg (EG-883 (1346–7) and VG-17 (9th/15th century)) (Piotrovsky, Mikhail (1999). Earthly beauty, heavenly art: Art of Islam. Amsterdam: Lund Humphries Publishers, figs. 10 and 11, p. 75) or in the Nasser D. Khalili collection (GLS 5 72) (Rogers, Michael (2009). Islamic painting in the Israel Museum. Chefs-d'œuvre de la collection Khalili, Paris: Gallimard, fig. 426). This motif can also be found in the manuscripts 239 (1775) from the Qasr al-Manya Museum and 4009.10.77 (seventeenth century) from the National Museum of Israel on December 16, 2008 (Vente n° 54 Gros et Delettrez du 16 décembre 2008, Paris: Gros et Delettrez, fig. 426). This motif can also be found in the manuscripts 239 (1775) from the Qasr al-Manya Museum and 4009.10.77 (seventeenth century) from the National Museum of Israel (Milstein, Rachel (1984). Islamic painting in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem: The Museum, p. 136, fig. 159).

Minorsky, V. (1958). The Chester Beatty Library, A catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts and miniatures. Dublin: Hodges Figgis and Co. Ltd, fig. 465, pp. 103–1. This manuscript was copied by Muhammad Amin al-Rushdi in 1798.
However, one must underline the presence of a unique mention of the sandals in the second section (ḥizb) of the prayers through the epithet “ṣāḥib al-naʿlayn” (the owner of the two sandals) defining Muhammad.


Schimmel, p. 42.


Meri, p. 99.

Marie de St Elie, Père Anastase, p. 365.

"Umarrīgī fi l-mīthāl buyād wajhi fa-qad jaʿalā l-Nabī lahā qibāla wa mà ḥubbu al-nīʿāl shaghafia qalbi wa ḥubban man labisa al-nīʿāl”

MSS. 3427, copied in Morocco in Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1245/July-August 1829 and MSS. 883 copied in Morocco around the end of the 11th/17th century.

See for example the architectural images from the Umayyad Quran found in the Mosque of Sanaa, housed at Dar al-Makhṭūṭāt in Sanaa (DAM 20–33.1). For a discussion on the meaning of these images, Grabar, Oleg (2013). L’ornement. Formes et fonctions dans l’art islamique. Paris: Flammarion, pp. 216–42.