

Article

The Cover of the Holy Building, the Symbol of Politics: The Historical Power Rivalry over the Kiswa of the Ka'ba

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Abstract: For Muslims, the Ka'ba holds immense significance as the destination of pilgrimage—an obligatory act of worship—and as the direction toward which prayers are performed. The kiswa is a cover that has been placed on the Ka'ba, the holiest place in Islam, since the Jāhiliyya period as an expression of respect for it. Although there are some exceptions in Islamic history, it is usually changed once a year and it was woven in different colours according to the period, and finally it became a tradition to be black. The kiswa of the Ka'ba is one of the most important religious and political symbols of Islamic history. This article analyses the role of the kiswa of the Ka'ba in the relations between Muslim rulers in the Islamic world throughout history. From the earliest periods of Islam, the kiswa has been recognized as a symbol of legitimacy and a means of asserting control over the administration of pilgrimage. Many states, such as the Abbāsids, Mamlūks, and Ottomans, expressed or reinforced their political legitimacy among Muslims by showing their influence over the Ka'ba through the tradition of the kiswa. In the medieval Islamic world, Muslim states or local administrators of these states especially used the kiswa as a symbol of sovereignty, thus increasing their influence in the regions they governed. Some Muslim administrators who wanted to send the kiswa to the Ka'ba competed with each other or prevented the other from sending the kiswa to the Ka'ba because each year only one kiswa was sent to Mecca. In this study, the position of the kiswa as a political symbol in the quest for the legitimacy of Muslim rulers in Islamic history and the historical development of this issue are discussed and analysed with examples.



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1. Introduction

Throughout history, religious places and symbols have been more than just a part of the world of faith; they have also been attributed to political meanings. For example, Jerusalem, a city that has an important place and is considered sacred in all three divine religions, is still on the world agenda today with the religious and political struggles shaped around Al-Aqsā Mosque. Similarly, the Vatican is regarded as a centre of political as well as religious authority with the spiritual leadership of the Pope. The Vatican, which is the religious centre of more than one billion Catholics in the world, is very influential in world politics. The Pope, who is the spiritual leader, is also the president of the Vatican State (Poupard 1981; Şakiroğlu 2012). Just as religious places and symbols have political meanings today, there are symbols in the Islamic world that have similar meanings. In Islamic history, the cover (kiswa) of the Ka'ba went beyond being a religious symbol and became an indicator of legitimacy and political authority for Muslim rulers because the

Muslim ruler, who served the holy places, proved his power to other Islamic states and obtained respectability. For this reason, they often fought with each other to dominate Hejaz and thus to send the kiswa to the Ka'ba. Examples of this will be seen in the following pages of this article.

There are three cities that are considered sacred in Islam. These are Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.¹ Mecca² is the city where the religion of Islam was born, and is important because the Ka'ba and Masjid al-Harām, which is indispensable for worship such as pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage, is located here. Medina,³ the city of migration (Hijrah) and the location of the Prophet Muhammad's mosque and tomb, holds value as one of Islam's two sacred regions (Haramayn) and as the capital during the Prophet's era and, except for part of Ali's caliphate, during the Rāshidūn Caliphate. Jerusalem,⁴ on the other hand, is a city that Muslims value because of al-Aqsā Mosque, which is believed to be the place where the Prophet Muhammad experienced the miracle of Isrā and Mi'rāj (Q. 17:1), and which was the qibla of Muslims for about sixteen or seventeen months after the hijrah, although its status as a qibla was not clear before the hijrah (al-Bukhārī 2001; Ibn Sa'd 2001, vol. 1, p. 243).⁵ It is also valuable because it is the city where many prophets (Abraham, Ishmael, David, Solomon etc.) lived, whose prophethood is equally believed and respected in Islam.

The most important place in the region, which Muslims call "al-Haramayn" in the sense of "two holy places" referring to Mecca and Medina, is undoubtedly the Ka'ba. Known as "the cubic object", the Ka'ba is mentioned twice in the Qur'an and referred to by names such as *Bayt* (House) and *Bayt Allāh* (House of Allāh) (Q. 5:95, 97; 2:125, 127, 158; 8:35; 106:3). There is a dispute as to who was the first builder of the Ka'ba, which is located in the middle of al-Masjid al-Harām in the city of Mecca. Although there are Israelite narrations with elements of exaggeration and legend that it was built by the Prophet Adam or his son Seth, or even that angels built it before them, the Islamic sources are dominated by the view that the first builder was the Prophet Adam⁶ (al-Dīnawarī 2011; al-Azraqī 1979, vol. 1, p. 36–38; al-Kalā'ī 1420; Ünal 2001).

In order to enable more people to serve the Ka'ba, more than one duty was created even in the Jāhiliyya period. These were duties such as 'imāra, siqāya, hijāba, and sidāna. The verses (Q. 9:19) and the narrations related to the reasons for their revelation, which emphasize who will build the mosques, and that siqāya and 'imāra are not the same as faith in Allāh and the Last Day and jihad in the way of Allāh, reveal that carrying out these duties both in the Jāhiliyya period and in the first period of Islam was a means of pride and was considered superior to many deeds. For this reason, Muslims have been eager and diligent about serving the Ka'ba since the first Islamic period (Bozkurt 2000). Muslims have a great respect for the Ka'ba, which is the place of pilgrimage, one of the important pillars of Islam, the qiblah of their prayers, and which Allāh calls "my house" (Q. 22:26) in the Qur'an. This respect does not change among dignitaries such as caliphs and sultans, nor the people.

The services related to the Holy Ka'ba were carried out by the administrators, especially those who dominated the region. These services included the cleaning, maintenance, and repair of the Ka'ba, guarding its doors and keys, and odourising it. In the history of Islam, one of the responsibilities of the pilgrimage amīr (amīr al-hajj), who was in charge of ensuring that the pilgrimage was performed in accordance with the rules and in safety, and who undertook these duties, was the delivery and covering of the kiswa to the Ka'ba. The pilgrimage amīr, who travelled from Damascus during the Umayyad period (41–132 AH/661–750 CE) and Baghdad during the Abbāsīd period (132–656 AH/750–1258 CE), has been travelling from Egypt to Mecca since the Mamlūk sul-

tanate (648–923 AH/1250–1517 CE), which re-established the Abbāsīd caliphate in Egypt (Atalar 1995).

Although initially covering the Ka'ba with the kiswa was considered a religious ritual because it was the cover of a sacred structure, the act of covering it with the kiswa has acquired different meanings throughout history. Along with the khutba and the mahmal, it has been described as the most powerful symbol of a ruler's ascendancy or claim to ascendancy over the holy cities (Dekkiche 2015). However, some scholars argue that the respect shown by the Ottoman sultans to the Ka'ba was unrivalled by any previous ruler. They called themselves the rulers, not the rulers, of the Haramayn and were extremely pleased to bear the title of Khādīm al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn (Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries) (Kazıcı 1999).

There are several studies on the Ka'ba's kiswa. One of these is a study conducted by Civelek titled "Kâbe Örtüsünün Değiştirilmesi Bağlamında Orta Doğu'da Osmanlı Dönemi Nüfuz Mücadelesi ve Bunun Arap Basınına Yansımaları" ("The Struggle for Influence in the Middle East During the Ottoman Period in the Context of the Replacement of the Ka'ba's Kiswa and Its Reflections in the Arab Press"). This study focuses on the historical development of the kiswa in general and how the Ottoman struggle for influence in the Middle East in the early 20th century was reflected in the Arab press (Civelek 2012). Another study indirectly related to the topic is Metin's article titled "Osmanlıların Kâbe ve Mescid-i Haram Hizmetleri" ("The Services of the Ottomans to the Ka'ba and the Masjid al-Haram"). This work examines not only the kiswa but also all forms of Ottoman services to the Ka'ba and Mecca (Metin 2015). A further study was conducted by Basahih under the title "Crafting the Kaaba's Kiswa: Context and Traditional Practices". This article particularly focuses on the weaving process of the kiswa, its decorative and aesthetic value, and the meticulous care given to its craftsmanship (Basahih 2018). Alashari, in his study titled "The Endowment Devoted to the Kiswa of the Kaaba: A Historical Study", examined the endowment allocated for the production of the kiswa and aimed to uncover the first founders of this system established for this purpose during the Islamic period (Alashari 2022). Although these studies refer to the historical significance of the kiswa, they do not adopt a comprehensive perspective on the subject addressed in this article, as their focus points vary.

There are other studies that are more closely related to the topic discussed in our article. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes' work "Le Voile de la Ka'ba" deals with the historical development of the cover of the Ka'ba (kiswa) and its applications in different periods (Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1954). It is observed that in different periods of Islamic history, the rulers did not only consider the kiswa as a donation or a tradition but also as an element that reinforced their political authority. Especially during the Umayyad, Abbāsīd, Mamlūk, and Ottoman periods, the kiswa served to identify the ruler with the sacred and became an element of inter-state rivalry. This point is touched upon in Gaudefroy-Demombynes' study. However, our article additionally examines in detail, with chronological examples, the use of the kiswa as a sign of power in inter-state relations and its role in ensuring the legitimacy of power, emphasizing that kiswa is not only a cover but also a powerful symbol of how rulers in the Islamic world legitimized their political authority. It also shows how the political competition over the kiswa continued in the modern period and how Saudi Arabia monopolised the production of the kiswa. In this context, this study, which deals with the kiswa not only as a religious and historical object, but also as a concrete indicator of political power, religious authority, and legitimacy claim, aims to bring a new perspective to the existing literature and aims to open the door to new research on how the political competition over the kiswa continues in the modern period.

Malika Dekkiche, who evaluates the dominance of Hejaz between the Mamlūks and Timurids, two states that competed on the issue of kiswa, focuses on the religious supremacy of these two states in Hejaz (Dekkiche 2015). Dekkiche also includes developments regarding the kiswa between the two states in this study. It is seen that Dekkiche especially emphasizes that the disregard of the cover hung inside the Ka'ba was not taken into consideration and gives details about it. In this respect, the study provides important information for those researching the subject. What distinguishes this study from Dekkiche's article is that it focuses specifically on the debates about the kiswa and, chronologically, on the disputes of different states on this issue.

Another study on the subject is "Le serviter des deux saints sanctuaires et ses Mahmal. Des Mamelouks aux Ottomans" by Veinstein. The researcher touches upon the Mamlūk–Ottoman rivalry, which falls within the scope of our article, by focussing on the mahmal and the kiswa in general. It has been observed that it includes the findings and evaluations we have reached during our research. The subject has been examined in great detail, specifically in terms of the events between these two states, and has contributed to the field. This article differs from Veinstein's research in that it focuses on the many rivalries experienced between many political actors (Veinstein 2009).

After all of these evaluations, it should be stated that this article focuses on the religious and political meanings of the kiswa throughout history, its role in diplomatic relations and the conflicts that arose for this purpose by using chronological examples. In this way, the significance of changing the cover of a sacred place in the political arena will be revealed, along with its impact on relations between rival states and how a ritual that acquired religious meaning was also utilized as a political symbol.

In this study, both primary and secondary sources have been utilised on the historical and political symbolism of the cover of the Ka'ba. Primary sources include al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmi' al-sahīh*, which is one of the most important sources in the field of hadith, the books of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghribirdī, famous historians of the Mamlūk period, and *Subh al-a'shā'* by al-Qalqashandī, one of the historians of the same period, al-Azraqī's *Akhbār al-Makkah*, Ibn Fahd's *Ithāf al-Warā'*, Ibn Hajar's biographical work *Inbā al-gumr*, as well as the works of Eyup Sabri Pasha, one of the late Ottoman authors, which is important for the study of the history of Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Bukhārī 2001; al-Maqrīzī 1997; al-Qalqashandī 1987; Ibn Fahd 1983–1990; Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986; Ibn Taghribirdī 1992). These works contain information about the conflicts regarding the kiswa. These sources are examined to analyse how the kiswa was used as a symbol of power and legitimacy. Regarding secondary sources, although there are fewer direct studies on the kiswa, how previous academic studies and historical analyses that may be indirectly related to the research deal with the primary sources was examined, and a comparative analysis was made. As a result of the analyses of both types of sources, the importance of the kiswa in the political and cultural context was better understood.

In this article, firstly, the definition of the kiswa, the materials from which it is produced, and how it is financed will be briefly discussed, and then the history of the kiswa tradition will be brought to the present day, starting from the pre-Islamic period. Then, the use of the kiswa firstly as a religious symbol and then as a political symbol will be discussed under separate headings. Finally, the competing states within the Islamic states on the subject of the kiswa will be discussed separately, and the sultans who made diplomatic attempts on this issue, whether they could compromise or not, and the prominence of the meaning of the political authority of the kiswa in these relations will be discussed. In the end, evaluations will be made with the findings obtained and seminal suggestions will be made for future research.

2. Definition, Structure, and Financing of the Kiswa

Definition: Kiswa, which is derived from the Arabic verb “kasā”, and means “one piece of clothing” (Ibn Manzūr n.d.), is a special term used in Islamic culture for the cover of the Ka’ba.

For centuries, including pre-Islamic times (*Jāhiliyya*), the services related to the Ka’ba were known as *hijāba* or *sidāna*. The maintenance of the Ka’ba and the safekeeping of its keys were carried out by officials called *hājib* or *sādin*. According to tradition, this responsibility passed from Prophet Ishmael to the Jurhum tribe,⁷ then to the Khuzā’a tribe,⁸ and then to Qusayy ibn Kilāb from the Quraysh tribe when he became the ruler of Mecca. During the conquest of Mecca by Muslims (8 AH/630 CE), the duty, held by ‘Uthman ibn Talha at the time, was reaffirmed and entrusted to ‘Uthman ibn Talha and his uncle’s son Shaybah ibn ‘Uthman by the Prophet Muhammad. After that, Banū Shaybah continued to fulfil this duty for centuries (Sarıçam 1998). In the early periods, the Ka’ba cover was not changed; instead, the new one was covered over the old one. Over time, this caused structural damage due to the accumulated weight. After the conquest of Mecca, when the duty of *hijāba*, which means being responsible for the cover and other affairs of the Ka’ba, was given to Banū Shaybah, the practice of removing the old covering and covering it with a new one was started (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Fākihī 1414; Ünal 2001). Additionally, the Ka’ba was covered both inside and out. While the interior covering was replaced less frequently as it was protected from external elements, the outer covering, subject to various conditions, was replaced more often (al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 281; Ünal 2001). Dekkiche argues that secondary sources on the debate about the outer and inner garment do not pay attention to the distinction between inner and outer garments and are therefore incomplete in their assessment (Dekkiche 2015).

The kiswa, as the Ka’ba’s cover is called, traditionally consisted of the main cover called *hijāb*, and a sash called *nitāq*. It was customary to write Quranic verses related to the Ka’ba on this sash and include the sovereign ruler’s name at the end (Metin 2015). The special cover for the door was known as a *burqū*. From the Abbāsīd period (132–656 AH/750–1258 CE) onwards, the name of the caliphs and the date were placed on this cover. During the Mamlūk era (648–923 AH/1250–1517 CE), it was crafted in two colours: black and blue (Ünal 2001).

Structure: Since this article focuses on the religious and political aspects of the kiswa tradition, it is not necessary to give detailed information about its structure and physical characteristics. However, it would be appropriate to give some general information to understand the subject better. Before the first one-piece cover, i.e., the kiswa was put on the Ka’ba, and different covers were put on piece by piece. For example, when gifts such as the covers on the sacrifices, silk fabrics, shawls, embroidered mattress faces, etc. were delivered to the Ka’ba, they were covered. Later on, a single piece of cloth was put over it (al-Azraqī 1979).

Initially, the kiswa was made from white or colourful fabrics, but the black fabric was later adopted as a tradition, which continues today (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). Sometimes, multiple coverings in different colours were used in a single year. For example, red, white, and qabatī (Egyptian) silk coverings were prepared during the Abbāsīd period: red for the Day of Arafah, qabatī silk for the start of the month of Rajab, and white for Laylat al-Qadr. In such cases, the covers were changed three times within a year (al-Azraqī 1979). In the Mamlūk era, the coverings were multi-coloured; for example, the kiswa sent by Sultan Khoshqadam (865–871 AH/1461–1467 CE) had a white silk covering for the eastern and northern walls of the Ka’ba (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). This information suggests that the west and south sides were of a different colour. The adoption of black fabric for the kiswa is often linked to the Abbāsīds, as black was their dynastic colour. However, at the end of the 16th century, during the Ottoman era, the white cover was used for a while

because the black colour was quickly affected by the sun and the pale cover looked bad. The inscription on this cover was written in black letters. Nonetheless, this practice did not last long (Faroghi 1995, p. 115). It is known that in 1806, the Wahhabis covered the Ka'ba with a red silk cover, followed by a black cover later on (Gouda 1989).

In both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, the Ka'ba was covered with various types of fabric, such as *'asb* (a striped Yemeni fabric), *wasāil* (a Yemeni fabric with red stripes), *melā* (soft, fine cloth), *Ma'āfir* (woven in Ma'āfir), and *hasf* (a coarse, thick fabric). Tubba⁹ was the first person to cover the Ka'ba with a single piece of cloth of this kind. It is also known that he used felt and leather covers. During the Prophet Muhammad's time, the covering was made from Yemeni fabric; during Caliph 'Umar's (13–23 AH/634–644 CE) and 'Uthman's periods (23–35 AH/644–656 CE), qabatī silk from Egypt was used. Caliph 'Uthman was the first to use double layers of fabric. During the Umayyad era (41–132 AH/661–750 CE), the kiswa covered by Mu'āwiya, 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr, and other statesmen was described as an atlas cloth, and in the narrations of the Abbāsids, it was described as a silk cloth (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 284; al-Fāsī 2000). The kiswa was decorated with very precious stones. The cover sent by Khoshqadam, one of the Circassian Mamlūk sultans (873–923 AH/1382–1517 CE), is made of solid silver on four sides and white silk on two sides and decorated with precious stones (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). Over time, it became customary to make the kiswa of black silk fabric and to write the word tawhid and verses about the Ka'ba on it with gold thread. In paintings of the Ka'ba from the 16th to 18th centuries, the kiswa has a rather plain appearance. Later, a strip of verses from the Qur'an was added to it, but this was abandoned after a while when the cover was trampled underfoot during the circumambulation of Muslims, and the verses were also trampled underfoot (Faroghi 1995, p. 115).

According to an interview given in 2020 by Muhammad ibn Abdallah al-Bājawda, the director of the factory established for the production of the Ka'ba cover, 660 kg of pure silk, 100 kg of silver and 120 kg of gold are used in the production of the cover today. The embroidered belt, also called 'Ka'ba belt', consists of 16 pieces. There are also six pieces under it. Black colour is preferred because it expresses seriousness and this colour suits the sanctity of the Ka'ba the best. The inner cover, woven from green silk, is rarely changed as in previous centuries because it is not damaged by external factors. The last time it was changed was during the reign of King Fahd (1996) (Bājawda 2020).

Financing: Since the early Islamic period, resources were allocated for the kiswa. The costs of the cover were met from the state budget, also called *bayt al-māl*, and in the period of Four Caliphs (Rāshidūn Caliphate) (11–41 AH/632–661 CE), the cover was woven in Egypt (al-Azraqī 1979). Foundations, which were established to allocate certain revenues to ensure the continuity of charitable works, were also established for the cover of the Ka'ba. The first systematic waqf for the kiswa was established by the Mamlūk Sultan Al-Malik al-Sālih Ishmael (743–746 AH/1342–1345 CE) (Alashari 2022). He endowed the revenues of three villages in Egypt for this purpose. Later, Sultan Qalawun (678–689 AH/1279–1290 CE) added two more villages to these endowments (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018; al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 4, p. 183). After the Hejaz came under Ottoman rule, the number of villages endowed for the Ka'ba cover increased to nine (Kurşun 2017). It has been claimed that the cover hung inside the Ka'ba was changed less frequently because it was prepared and sent from the ruler's personal wealth rather than through the foundation (Dekkiche 2015). However, Ünal, citing Qalqashandī, states that the reason for this was that it was not needed because it was not damaged by the sun and other external factors (Ünal 2001).

During the 19th century, the foundations of the kiswa woven in Egypt were abolished during the reign of Mehmet Ali Pasha, and the production expenses were directly covered

by the state budget (Alashari 2022). Today, the Saudi Arabian administration carries out these works.

It was also in 1927 that King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ordered the establishment of a factory in the Ajyad region to cover the Holy Ka’ba in Makkah al-Mukarrama. Most of the workers were Indian technicians and a few Saudis. In the same year (1927), the Kaaba was covered for the first time with the Saudi Kiswa. In 1977, a new coating factory was established, equipped with the latest equipment and capabilities required for coating production, while production continued to be done manually (Basahih 2018).

3. The History of the Kiswa Tradition

3.1. Pre-Islamic Period

The tradition of covering the Ka’ba with a kiswa dates back to the pre-Islamic period, known as the Jāhiliyya era, and developed as an expression of respect for the Ka’ba. (Wensinck 1977, vol. 6, pp. 9–14) According to tradition, the covering of the Ka’ba existed even before Islam, although it is not known exactly who first initiated it. However, several names are mentioned in this context. According to a narration from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet Muhammad prohibited insulting the Yemeni king, As’ad al-Himyarī, and stated: “Because he was the first man to cover the Ka’ba with a kiswa”. Scholars have particularly noted that As’ad al-Himyarī was the first person to cover the entire Ka’ba (al-Azraqī 1979; Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). In addition to As’ad, other names mentioned include Prophet Ishmael and Adnan, one of the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad (Ünal 2001).

3.2. Islamic Period

In the Islamic period, the tradition of covering the Ka’ba with a kiswa continued. Sources indicate that the Prophet Muhammad covered the Ka’ba with a kiswa made in Yemen (al-Azraqī 1979). After the Prophet Muhammad, the practice continued during the first four caliphs. For example, Caliphs ‘Umar and ‘Uthman covered the Ka’ba with thin fabrics called *qabatī* from Egypt. The Umayyad caliph Mu’āwiya (41–60 AH/661–680 CE) started to cover the Ka’ba twice a year, one at the end of the month of Ramadān and on the day of āshūrā. According to some sources, on the day of ‘arafah, the upper part of the red kiswa, called *qamīṣ*, was not sewn but only hung from the top. The lower part of the kiswa, called *īzār*, to prevent it from tearing during their return from Mina, was hung after the pilgrims left on āshūrā. The silken kiswa sent by ‘Abd al-Malīk ibn Marwān (65–86 AH/685–705 CE) was first spread in the mosque in Medina and then brought to Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979).

During the reign of Caliph al-Ma’mūn (198–218 AH/813–833 CE), one of the Abbāsīd caliphs, the tradition of changing the kiswa three times a year was established. These three kiswas consisted of different colours or types: red, white, and qabatī. The red one would be covered on the eve of ‘arafah, the qabatī one at the beginning of the month of Rajab, and the white one on the 27th night of Ramadān or the first day of Eid al-Ramadān. Although it is said that Al-Ma’mūn was the first to do this, his grandfather, Al-Mahdi, had removed all of the heavy kiswas during his reign due to concerns that they would cause the Ka’ba’s walls to collapse. Instead, three lighter kiswas made from qabatī, silk, and atlas were used. However, about 40 years later, the same problem occurred again. The covers that had been covered until then had begun to weigh again. For this reason, the Ka’ba was emptied again, and three new covers were put on. Over time, when the kiswas accumulated and became a safety hazard, they were taken down (al-Azraqī 1979; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 2, p. 45). Although the black kiswa became a tradition with the Abbāsīds, it was not used during the early caliphs’ reigns. From Al-Mamun to the time of Al-Nāsir li-Dīn Allāh (575–622 AH/1180–1225 CE), the colour continued to be white, but in 1183, the kiswa sent

by Al-Nasir was green, with red inscriptions. Toward the end of his caliphate, the *kiswa* was black with yellow writing. Thus, the white *kiswa* of al-Ma'mūn transformed into black, and this tradition continues to this day (Ünal 2001).

During the period of the Abbāsīd Caliphate, the Buyids dynasty (334–447 AH/945–1055 CE), which controlled Iraq and Khorasan before the Seljuks (447/1055), also placed great importance on the service of Haramayn, and 'Adūd al-Dawla (367–372 AH/978–983 CE) even became a ruler remembered for these services. The Buyid ruler 'Adūd al-Dawla was successful against the Fatimids and performed very important services in the holy land. He abolished the road tax for all pilgrims, including those from Iraq, renovated the roads between the two cities, built water systems, and sent a *kiswa* to the Ka'ba every year (Doğan Turay 2022). The Seljuks also placed great importance on sending *kiswas* and made significant efforts for many years. For example, in 1074, the Seljuk vizier Nizām al-Mulk personally went on a pilgrimage and ensured that the *kiswa* covered the Ka'ba on behalf of Malikshah (465–485 AH/1072–1092 CE). Moreover, this *kiswa* was originally prepared by the Ghaznavid ruler Mahmūd (388–421 AH/998–1030 CE), but it was not possible to put it on the Ka'ba.¹⁰ Finally, 40 years later, this service was performed by the Seljuks (Doğan Turay 2022; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 5, p. 96).

In the mid-13th century, during the Mamlūk sultanate, which dominated the Hejaz along with Egypt and Syria, great care was also given to the *kiswa*, and the tradition of sending black silk *kiswas* became established. Sultan Baybars (658–676 AH/1260–1277 CE) placed more importance on the ceremonies organized to ensure that these covers reached Mecca, and these ceremonies became an indicator of political authority. The Mamlūks utilized the workshops in Alexandria to prepare the silk *kiswas* (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992), and the *kiswas* were sometimes sent by sea and managed to reach the Ka'ba even in years when road security was not guaranteed (Ateş 1981; al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 7, p. 59). A sign of the importance given to the *kiswa* during the Mamlūk period was the careful selection of the person assigned to the task. The official in charge of preparing the *kiswa* was selected from among those known for their integrity and moral character (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 7, p. 59; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 43).

After the Mamlūks, the Ottoman Empire continued the tradition of covering the Ka'ba with a *kiswa*. When Sultan Selim I conquered Egypt (923/1517) and the territories controlled by the Mamlūks, the responsibility for governing the Hejaz and preparing the Ka'ba *kiswa* became a responsibility of the Ottoman sultans. The Ottomans generally had these covers woven in Egypt, but during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, while the fabric for the exterior and interior cover was still woven in Egypt, the interior cover began to be prepared in Istanbul. From the reign of Ahmed III (1703–1730) onwards, all fabrics were produced in Istanbul. During World War I (1914–1918), however, due to the Hejaz Rebellion, the *kiswa* was again sent from Egypt (Atalar 1991; al-Azraqī 1979; Ünal 2001). As mentioned earlier, the practice of having the *kiswa* woven in Egypt had been ongoing since the time of the Rāshidūn Caliphs. However, for some reasons, such as the weakening of the Abbāsīds, the cover was brought from Yemen instead of Egypt (al-Azraqī 1979).

In the Ottoman period, the Ka'ba cover sent from Cairo was replaced in a special ceremony, and the old cover was sent to Istanbul. When the Ka'ba's *kiswa* and *nitāq* (belt) arrived in Istanbul, they were welcomed with a special ceremony, stored in a chest and displayed for public visitation, and then sent to the palace and delivered to the *Khirqā-i Sa'ādat* chamber (Uzunçarşılı 1972). The old *kiswas* were distributed to mosques or prominent individuals and were laid on coffins because they were regarded as sacred (Metin 2015). These are preserved especially in the Chamber of Sacred Relics in Topkapı Palace but are sometimes exhibited in different cities, mosques, or museums.

The most important item of the *surra*¹¹ sent by Muslim rulers to the Hejaz every pilgrimage season was undoubtedly the *kiswa*. The *surra processions*, first sent during the Abbāsīd period, were continued by the Ayyubids and Mamlūks, who dominated Haramayn after them, and maintained their grandeur even after the Ottomans took over. Although a weak narration states that the first sultan to send the *surras* was Bayezid I, it is known that the *surras* were sent regularly starting from the period of Mehmed I/Çelebi Mehmed (Buzpınar 2009; Mekki 1318). However, these early *surras* sent by the Ottomans contained material assistance to the people of the Hejaz and sometimes Jerusalem and to those working in the holy places because in those years, the Mamlūk sultan was in charge of changing the *kiswa*. The Ottoman sultans fulfilled this duty meticulously, believing that the Haramayn deserved the best of everything, and sent two *surra processions* to Mecca and Medina every year (Atalar 1991). The first *surra* was called “Mahmal-i Humāyūn” and was sent by the Ottoman sultans themselves, while the other was called “Mahmal-i Misrī”, and sent by the khedive of Egypt (Uzunçarşılı 1972).

Although Muslim rulers aimed to send the Ka’ba’s *kiswa* and mahmal regularly each year, these services were sometimes interrupted due to security concerns. This occurred particularly in 1806 due to the insults and disturbances of the Wahhabis against the pilgrims. That year, a decision was made not to send the sacred objects, and during the Wahhabi disturbances, the *kiswas* for both the Ka’ba and the Rawda-i Mutahhara were not sent. However, after the region was reclaimed from the Wahhabis, the sacred coverings were sent again, and in 1814, the *kiswa* was delivered to Mecca (B. Ayaz 2014; Buhl 1977).

In 1926, when the political relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia deteriorated, the shipment of the *kiswa* was stopped. Meanwhile, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of Saud had a special factory established in Mecca. The cover of the Ka’ba, which was woven in this factory until 1936, was woven in Egypt again from this year until 1962. In 1962, the cover sent from Egypt was turned back from Jeddah and from this year onwards it was produced in the factory in Mecca established by the Saudi government. After the factory previously established in Mecca, the production of the Ka’ba cover was started in the new factory established outside Mecca in 1974 (Gouda 1989; Ünal 2001).

Today, the Ka’ba’s *kiswa* is traditionally renewed each year. Modern production processes, combined with traditional craftsmanship, ensure the continuation of this sacred tradition. The *kiswa* produced in Mecca today remains a significant symbol of aesthetic and spiritual values in the Islamic world (Basahih 2018). According to the information obtained from an interview conducted in 2020 with Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Bājawda, the director of the Kaaba Musharraf Cover Factory, a total of 200 people work in each unit within 8 to 10 months. People with manual dexterity, tailoring skills and sincerity are recruited through examinations, and the employees are entirely Saudis. This situation shows that Saud avoids employing a foreigner even in the production of cover. After all of the processes, a ceremony is organized at factory. The Riyāsat al-Haramayn Directorate receives the cover from the factory in this programme, which is also attended by the administrative authorities of Mecca. The Riyāsat al-Haramayn also gives this cover on the 1st day of Dhu al-Hijjah every year to the al-Shaybī family, which continues the *sidāna/hijāba* service today. This is because the duty of *hijāba*, i.e., covering the Bayt Allāh and keeping its keys, was given to this family by the Prophet Muhammad himself (Bājawda 2020).

4. The *Kiswa* (Ka’ba Cover) as a Religious Symbol

In the Jāhiliyya period, in order to authorise more people to serve the Ka’ba, duties such as *imāra*, *siqāya*, *hijāba*, and *sidāna* were created. These duties had very small political differences. As mentioned in the introduction, the verses¹² and the narrations about the reasons for their revelation, which emphasize who will build the mosques, and that *siqāya*

and 'imāra are not equal to faith in Allāh and the Last Day and jihad in the way of Allāh, reveal that both in the Jāhiliyya period and the first period of Islam, carrying out these duties was a matter of pride and was considered superior to many deeds. The narrations about this in Islamic sources reinforced the desire of Muslims to serve the Ka'ba in later periods (al-Muslim 1426).¹³

The change of the Ka'ba cover (kiswa) has gained different meanings with the effect of political events that developed over time. Nevertheless, it has always been seen by sultans as a means of earning Allāh's pleasure and serving religion. The female Mamlūk sultan, Shajarāt al-Durr¹⁴ was characterized as a competent administrator and a pious philanthropist. This characterization of her is related to the fact that she was the first sultan to send the surra procession and to send the cover called *burqū* to the door of the Ka'ba (Demir 2023; Tomar 2010; Ünal 2001).

The Ottoman sultans regarded serving the Haramayn and changing the kiswa annually as a significant responsibility. They expressed this duty with the title "Khâdim al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn" (Servant of the Two Holy Sanctuaries), previously used by the Ayyubid and Mamlūk sultans. Ottoman historian Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, while discussing the arrangements of Yavuz Sultan Selim, who took Egypt from the Mamlūks, stated that the sultan regarded his services to the Haramayn as a religious duty (Ahmet Cevdet Paşa 1974, vol. 6, p. 433; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 47; B. Ayaz 2014).

The Ka'ba cover is an important symbol that emphasizes the spiritual value of the Ka'ba, one of the most sacred places in the Islamic world, and represents profound respect. In Islamic history, the kiswa has been an indicator of both devotion to God and the unity of Muslims. This covering is not only a physical means of protection but also a tradition loaded with religious and spiritual meanings. This tradition, which existed in the pre-Islamic period, transformed into an Islamic obligation when the Prophet cleaned the Ka'ba and covered it after the conquest of Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979).

Although the kiswa is not directly ordered by religion and its colour, structure, etc. are not determined by religion, it has gained a religious meaning due to the fact that it is worn on the Ka'ba. When Muslims go to the harem region for pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage, they have to perform some *tawāf*¹⁵ to complete their worship. During pilgrimage in general and *tawāf* in particular, people of all colours, cultures, ages, and wealth levels such as rich and poor, young and old, black and white, are on an equal level in a single form. Muslims from all over the world move and pray toward the same goal, in the same direction. Thus, Muslims realize equality and unity. The benefits of pilgrimage, which also means spiritual purification, are also mentioned in the Qur'an.¹⁶ The Ka'ba, which is the centre point for this worship, is always seen and visited in a covered manner. Therefore, the kiswa becomes a spiritual focal point during pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage worship. As a result, the kiswa has become identified with the Ka'ba and has acquired a religious identity (Görgün 1996).

In the late Ottoman period, non-Muslims' respect for traditions such as the pilgrimage and sending the kiswa is noteworthy. When Napoleon invaded Egypt, he announced that he would not interfere with the supplies allocated to the Haramayn and that the Ka'ba cover produced in Egypt would continue to be sent regularly. Although this was intended to establish a friendly relationship with the Ottomans, at first glance, it was perceived as an example of respect for the sacred and religious tolerance (B. Ayaz 2014).

Similarly, in the early 19th century, the French commander's attitude towards the kiswa after the war is also noteworthy. The Ka'ba cover, which had previously been prepared by Kethüda Mustafa Ağa, was stored in the Hussein Mosque in Cairo but had been damaged by humidity. After the war, the French commander ordered the repair of the cover and sent it to Mecca when the time came. Although this attitude has been interpreted

as aiming to establish an alliance between Muslims and the French, it has been presented as respect for the sacred (al-Jabartī 1998; B. Ayaz 2014).

5. The Kiswa as a Political Symbol

The Ka'ba cover (kiswa) has not only been a religious symbol but also a powerful indicator of political authority and influence. As a symbol of dominance over the Haramayn, it has held great significance for every Islamic state claiming leadership. The inscriptions embroidered on the cover not only consisted of religious expressions but also included the name of the ruler of the time. This made the kiswa a tool for reinforcing political legitimacy. The kiswa sent to the Ka'ba with the surra procession is an important element that clearly expressed the caliph's or sultan's protective role over the Haramayn.

Political rivalries have had a direct effect on the sending of the kiswa. For example, in 971, the Fatimids sent an army to break the Abbāsīd caliph's influence and dominate the Hejaz but were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in 974, they succeeded in having the sermon (khutba¹⁷) in Hejaz read in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Muizz and sent a very valuable cover to the Ka'ba as a sign of victory.¹⁸ However, before this, the kiswa had been sent by the Abbāsīds. During this period, the kiswa became a symbol of the political struggle for power (al-Maqrīzī 1996; Çelik 2010; Toqqoush 2001, pp. 232–33).

Like other Islamic states, the Mamlūk sultans, who ruled over Egypt about a century after the Fatimids, regarded the service to the Haramayn as a great source of prestige and honour, and through these services, they consolidated their influence in the Hejaz. The first mahmal and kiswa sent by Mamlūk Sultan Baybars from Cairo to Mecca in 1266 demonstrated the power of the Egyptian sultan and his authority over the Islamic world through the Abbāsīd caliph (Ateş 1981; Buhl 1977; Erol 2020; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 58).

The ceremonies of sending the mahmal and the kiswa were not only a religious obligation but also a political demonstration that emphasised the Mamlūks' authority in the Islamic world (Aşan and Yuvalı 2011; Jomier 1972; Koprıman 1989). The Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun received a promise from the sharif of Mecca, Abū Numayy, not to send the cover to the Ka'ba from anywhere other than Egypt and made this symbol a part of his authority (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 2, p. 157; Küçükaşçı 2017). The Mamlūks strengthened their influence in the Haramayn and emphasized their superiority over their political rivals, especially during this period.

Atalar (1991) states that the mahmal ceremonies became a magnificent event reflecting the organizing ruler's authority over the Islamic world. Furthermore, the fact that the name of the ruler appears at the end of the verses written on the kiswa's belt section indicates that this service had a strong political meaning in addition to its religious aspect (Civelek 2012; Rubin 1986). Likewise, the inscriptions on the mahmal were used to increase the authority of the sultan, just like on the kiswa (Jomier 1972).

The conquest of Egypt by Yavuz Sultan Selim in 1517 and the transfer of the caliphate to the Ottomans marked the beginning of a new era in the kiswa tradition. The Ottomans continued the tradition of preparing the kiswa in Egypt as they had done before. From the reign of Qānūnī Sultan Sulaiman (1520–1566), they started to prepare the outer cover of the Ka'ba in Egypt and the inner cover in Istanbul, and later, from the period of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730), the kiswa was entirely produced in Istanbul. This change was aimed at increasing the influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Haramayn and boosting its prestige in the Islamic world. The sending of the kiswa to Mecca with the surra procession symbolically strengthened the Ottoman sultans' title of "Khādīmu'l-Haramayn" (Servant of the Two Holy Sanctuaries). This practice, and the inscription of sultans' names on the kiswa, became a way for the Ottomans to assert their leadership in the Islamic world (Atalar 1991; Civelek 2012).

The Ka'ba cover also symbolized a diplomatic tool during times of war and conflict. For example, during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), the French continued the production and sending of the kiswa in an attempt to gain the support of Muslims. However, during this period the kiswa became not just a religious symbol but also a political battleground. During the subsequent Wahhabi movement, the political and military conflicts between the Ottomans and the Wahhabis had a direct impact on the sending of the kiswa. The Wahhabis rejected the kiswa and thus challenged the Ottoman authority over the Haramayn (Buhl 1977).

Also during the Saudi period, Egypt continued to send the cover of the Ka'ba every year after Muhammad Ali Pasha took over the rule of Egypt (1805–1848). There were times when it was interrupted due to the First World War and a crisis between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It was also in 1927 that King 'Abd al-'Azīz ordered the establishment of a factory in the Ajyad region to cover the Holy Kaaba in Makkah al-Mukarrama. Most of the workers were Indian technicians and a few Saudis. In the same year (1927), the Ka'ba was covered for the first time with the Saudi Kiswa (Basahih 2018). The kiswa, which was woven in this factory until 1936, was woven in Egypt again from this year until 1962. In 1962, the cover sent from Egypt was turned back from Jeddah and from that year on it was produced in the factory in Mecca established by the Saudi government (Gouda 1989; Ünal 2001).

In 1908, the news the Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi Pasha had changed the Ka'ba cover on his own behalf was carefully monitored by the Ottoman administration, and this news was quickly refuted as it could potentially harm the Ottoman religious and political authority in the Islamic world. It seems that the Ottomans followed the news about the kiswa in the newspapers closely and intervened when necessary (Civelek 2012).

It has already been stated that the Ka'ba cover, beyond being a religious symbol in the Islamic World, is an indicator of the struggle for political authority and leadership. Islamic states such as the Fatimids, Abbāsids, Mamlūks, Timurids, Ilkhanids, and Ottomans have sought to establish or strengthen their authority over the Haramayn through the sending of the kiswa. This process shows that the Ka'ba and the Haramayn were not only places of worship but also politically significant centres in the Islamic world. In connection with this, the kiswa has continued to be a symbol of leadership and authority throughout Islamic history. There is a wealth of information and details in sources regarding the struggles between these states.

6. Competition Between Muslim Rulers over the Kiswa

6.1. Competition Between the Abbāsids and the Fatimids

The sovereignty over Hejaz and the privilege of sending covers to the Ka'ba were regarded as important indicators of political power during the Abbāsīd period. The Fatimids (297–567 AH/909–1171 CE) endeavoured to end the Abbāsīd supremacy and dominate the Hejaz, and they succeeded in this goal for a while. Over time, the khutbahs in Mecca began to be recited again in the name of the Abbāsīd caliph. In the face of this situation, the Fatimid Caliph al-Muizz (341–365 AH/953–975 CE) took action in 971 by preparing an army. Although his first attempt was unsuccessful, he attacked the pilgrimage caravans by inciting some Arab tribes during the pilgrimage season in 974 and succeeded in having the khutbah in Haramayn recited in his name. Upon this victory, Caliph al-Muizz sent a very valuable cover to the Ka'ba, whereas this was previously done only by the Abbāsīds (al-Maqrīzī 1996; Çelik 2010; Toqqoush 2001). But the Abbāsīds also made attempts to have the khutbah recited in their name. They tried to attract the amir of Mecca, Sharif Abū al-Futūh al-Hasan ibn Ja'far, to their side (381/991). However, the amir not only rejected this offer but also declared that the khutbah would be read on behalf of the Fatimids and informed the Fatimid caliph about this development. In gratitude for this

loyalty of the amir, the Fatimid caliph sent him valuable gifts along with a kiswa (Çelik 2010; Surūr n.d.; Toqqoush 2001).

The Fatimids, rather than direct intervention, sometimes maintained their influence in the holy cities through other statesmen. For instance, when the khutbah began to be recited in the name of the Abbāsīd Caliph al-Qāim Bi-’amr Allāh (422–467 AH/1031–1075), Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir (427–487 AH/1036–1094 CE) appointed the Shiite ruler of Yemen, Sulayhi to go to Mecca and have the sermon read in his name again, on the condition that no blood would be shed (455/1063). It is clearly stated in the sources that Sulayhi established his sovereignty over Hejaz, and it is also recorded that he covered the Ka’ba in a white cover (Çelik 2010; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 5, p. 73).

6.2. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Rasulids

The Mamlūk period was one of the most significant times for competition over the kiswa, and an important dimension of this rivalry was with the Rasulids in Yemen. The Rasulids (626–858 AH/1229–1454 CE), aiming to maintain their dominance over Hejaz, frequently clashed with the Mamlūks over sending the kiswa. Mamlūk Sultan Baybars’ pilgrimage in 1269 was accepted as a demonstration that the right to dress the Ka’ba in a covering was solely the Mamlūks’ privilege. However, in 1271, the King of Yemen attempted to seize Hameyn, and although he failed, he left traces of the rivalry against Egypt. After the death of Baybars, the Rasulids took action again in 1277 and continued their rivalry against the Mamlūks. In an effort to end these conflicts, the new Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun obtained a promise from the amir of Mecca, Sharif Abū Numayy, that he would only accept the kiswa sent from Egypt and would not accept kiswa from anywhere else. This period clearly demonstrates how the kiswa was used as a symbol of political power and dominance in the region (N. a.-D. 1983–1990, vol. 3, p. 114; Karakaş 2023). A similar declaration of loyalty was also sent in 1282. According to this, Sharif Abū Numayy swore an oath to the Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun that he would ‘remain loyal to the sultan and his children, be a friend to the sultan’s friends and an enemy to his enemies, not to leave obedience and not to take any opposing action, to cover only the kiswa sent from Egypt to the Ka’ba every year and not to accept any other cover from anyone else’ and some other things. With this obedience, it was confirmed that the Rasulids had been eliminated and the title of “Khādim al-Haramayn” (Custodian of the Two Holy Sanctuaries) belonged only to the Mamlūk sultan (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 2, p. 157; al-Qalqashandī 1987; F. Y. Ayaz 1998; I. a.-D. Ibn Fahd 1986). In the following century, in 1379, the kiswa sent by the ruler of Yemen, Ashraf, to Mecca was met with resistance from the Egyptian pilgrimage amir, and the issue was resolved through the intervention of the sharif of Mecca (Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986).

6.3. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Ilkhanids

The rivalry between the Mamlūks and the Ilkhanids (654–754 AH/1256–1353 CE) reached a new stage with the conversion of Ghāzān Khan to Islam. This development changed the nature of the relationship between the two powers because they were no longer faced with a pagan, shamanic non-Muslim leader but with a Muslim ruler who introduced himself as “Sultān al-Islām” (the Sultan of Islam) (Uzun 2023). Ghāzān Khan had launched several attacks on the lands under Mamlūk control, and he succeeded in occupying Syria for three months. Additionally, he tried to strengthen his legitimacy in the eyes of the people by propagating that the administrators in Syria and Egypt had deviated from the faith. He took steps to ensure the security of the pilgrimage route, and in 1302, he sent gifts to the people of the Haramayn (the Two Holy Mosques) and arranged for the preparation of the mahmal and kiswa (cover of the Ka’ba), but the Battle of Shaḡhāb thwarted this plan (Amitai 2005; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992; Irwin 2012; Uzun 2023). As seen, Ghāzān Khan’s

plans were not limited to military strategy; he made various attempts to obtain religious authority in Mecca by intervening in issues such as the security of the pilgrimage route. The competition between the Ilkhanids and the Mamlūks turned into a struggle where elements such as the pilgrimage season, the Ka'ba's kiswa, and the pilgrimage routes were of strategic and symbolic importance. This demonstrates that dominance in the Islamic world was not only related to the military but also to religious and cultural authority. The Mamlūk Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, after his victory over Ghāzān Khan, used titles such as “al-Mujahid, al-Muzaffar, al-Mansur, Sultan of Islam and Muslims” as well as “al-Khādīm al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn” (Amitai 2005; Uzun 2023).

Abū Sa'īd Bahadur, who succeeded Oljaitu Khan, who took over the throne after Ghāzān Khan, had some tensions with the Mamlūks, and sent gifts to the Hejaz in 1319 and included a kiswa for the Ka'ba. However, this attempt was prevented by the Mamlūks. Nevertheless, during these events, the amir of pilgrimage took the initiative and made a concession. The Ilkhanid vizier Tāj al-Dīn Ali Shah sent two rings adorned with precious stones to be hung on the Ka'ba to fulfil his vow (*adaq*).¹⁹ Although it was initially stated that this was not possible without the sultan's permission, when it was emphasized that it was a vow, they allowed it to be hung for a short time and the vow to be fulfilled (Ibn Fahd 1983–1990, vol. 3, pp. 160–61; Uzun 2023).

After the peace agreement between Abū Sa'īd Bahadur Khan and Sultan Nasir Muhammad in 1320, relations between the two parties became more stable. In the same year, seven pilgrim caravans from Egypt and a caravan from Iraq arrived, and although Abū Sa'īd paid great attention to the mahmal, he could not attempt to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba due to the peace between them. The Mamlūks' dominance over the Haramayn, which began with Baybars, ceased to be a matter of dispute under the subsequent sultans, especially Sultan Nāsir Muhammad, and a period of consolidation of their authority began with him (Uzun 2023).

6.4. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Timurids

This section of the article will focus on the issue of the Ka'ba's kiswa, which came to the fore in these conflicts, rather than the struggle between the Mamlūks and the Timurids (771–913 AH/1370–1507 CE) for the control of the Hejaz. However, it would be useful to discuss the relations between the two states in a general framework before entering this subject. After the Mamlūks stopped the Mongols and established their dominance over Egypt, Syria, and the Hejaz, they became the most powerful state in the Islamic world. However, over time, other powers also emerged who wanted to attain this status. One of them was Shahrukh, the ruler of the Timurids. Shahrukh, who took over the death of his father, Timur, was known as a sincere and devout Muslim. Unlike his father, he prioritized Sharia over the laws of Genghis Khan and sought to gain a reputation as both a political and religious authority in the Islamic world (al-Maqrīzī 1997; Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986; Kanat 1996; Uzun 2020). For this reason, Shahrukh repeatedly attempted to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba, but his requests were rejected each time. One of his serious attempts took place on 13 October 1429.²⁰ A delegation of envoys brought letters and gifts from both Shahrukh and his son, the ruler of Shiraz, Ibrahim Sultan. While presenting these letters, they also offered numerous valuable gifts to the sultan. However, this request was responded to with limited permission, and the requests for the outer cover of the Ka'ba were rejected. Shahrukh's demands included the construction of a waterway in Mecca and sending to him of Ibn Hajar's *Fath al-Bārī*, which he wrote as a commentary on *al-Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, and Al-Maqrīzī's *al-Sulūk li Ma'rifat al-Duwal al-Mulūk*. While his requests regarding books were accepted without any objection, those regarding the Ka'ba and the sacred places were rejected outright. The Mamlūk sultan's response was quite clear: “There is a special foundation for the kiswa of the Ka'ba, and there is no need for another sultan to send a

cover. As for the construction of the waterway, there is no need for that either; the existing ones are sufficient" (Aka 1994). Although the response emphasized that there was no need for the requests, as understood from the subsequent dialogues, these demands were rejected due to the religious and political significance of sending the kiswa to the Ka'ba. Another letter of Shahrukh containing the same request was delivered to Sultan Barsbay in Cairo on 21 January 1433 (al-Maqrizī 1997, vol. 7, p. 248; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, pp. 200–1). These rejection letters angered Shahrukh, and he threatened that they would have to bear the consequences if their demands were rejected. However, Sultan Barsbay ignored these threats and displayed a harsh attitude. In this letter, Shahrukh addressed Sultan Barsbay as "amir" instead of "sultan", which further strained the relations. These letters were sent back and forth several times, but the sultan never responded positively. On the contrary, he sent harsh replies. Additionally, the envoys were not treated well. Sultan Barsbay's strong responses to Shahrukh increased the rumours among the people that the Timurids would attack Damascus. Nonetheless, Barsbay remained determined to maintain the Mamlūks' authority over the Ka'ba (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, pp. 200–1).

On 2 September 1434, Shahrukh made a new attempt with a letter in which he stated that he had vowed to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba and that he had spent 12,000 dinars preparing it. He wanted the Mamlūk sultan to send a man and receive the cover. This request, which had previously been rejected, sometimes with a milder reaction and sometimes quite harshly, sparked a new controversy this time. Because the fulfilment of a vow is a religious responsibility, it is not right to prevent a Muslim from fulfilling his vow. Due to the religious dimension of the situation, a meeting was held with the participation of the chief judges of the four Sunni schools of law on 11 September 1434, and the issue was discussed. In this meeting, Barsbay expressed his concern that accepting the kiswa would allow other states to send their own covers, potentially leading to further tensions (Düzenli 2021; Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986, vol. 8, p. 329). At the meeting, the Hanafī chief judge, 'Aynī, ruled that Shahrukh's vow was invalid, while the Shāfi'ī chief judge, Ibn Hajar, dismissed the request as impermissible because such requests could lead to similar tensions in the future (al-Malatī 2002, vol. 4, p. 363; Kanat 1996). As a result, despite the different reasons, a consensus was reached to reject Shahrukh's request, with Barsbay's guidance.²¹

The main reason behind Sultan Barsbay's rejection of the kiswa request was the political risks of allowing other states to send covers to the Ka'ba, which could strengthen their claims of political superiority. This request, which had a religious dimension due to the issue of vow, was rejected with the opinion and approval of religious authorities. Thus, it was hoped that Shahrukh, being a Muslim himself, would consent to the decision of the chief qadis (Düzenli 2021). This clash between Barsbay and Shahrukh brought the two sides to the brink of war, but the war did not take place due to some other developments (al-Maqrizī 1997, vol. 4/2, p. 962; Kanat 1996). Another notable point was that Sultan Barsbay accepted all of Shahrukh's gifts except the kiswa. He even made it very clear that his kiswa would not be draped on the Ka'ba in the following reply by his envoy, who left a month after the meeting (25 September 1434): "As it was the custom before and is the custom today, only the Mamlūks of Egypt can cover the Ka'ba. This custom has the force of law. The kiswa is made by foundations, and there is no need for any assistance in this matter. If the king wants to fulfil his vow, he should sell the kiswa and distribute the money to the poor in Mecca. This will benefit more people and bring greater reward" (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 239). This attitude disturbed Shahrukh so much that he allied with the Akkoyunlu against the Mamlūks (Koprāman 1992).

The Timurid ruler Shahrukh also conveyed his request to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba to Sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn Chaqmaq (1438–1453), who succeeded Barsbay. On 27 November 1444, Shahrukh's envoy arrived with a group of one hundred people, in-

cluding an elderly woman who was Shahrukh's wife. The Mamlūk Sultan had given permission in the previous year's correspondence, and so the delegation had set off with the Ka'ba cover. In response to the reactions, Sultan Chaqmaq stated, "This is a form of closeness. Anyone can put a cover to the Ka'ba", which disturbed the Egyptians greatly (Ibn Taghribirdī 1992, vol. 15, pp. 120–21). This year, Shahrukh's kiswa was sent with the Egyptian caravan and hung inside the Ka'ba. At this time, it was found that Shahrukh's cover was not the only cover inside the Ka'ba; it was hung together with the cover previously hung by Barsbay in 826/1423, and both covers remained hanging there until Ramadān 856/1452. After that, by the order of Chaqmaq, the covers were replaced with his own (Ibn Fahd 1983–1990; Dekkiche 2015). It is said that the alliance between Chaqmaq and Shahrukh had an effect on his success. Some even interpreted this development as Shahrukh was so pleased with the alliance of the Arab and Persian states that he sent a kiswa to the Ka'ba as a sign of gratitude (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018).

6.5. Competition Among Mamlūk Amirs

The issue of covering the Ka'ba with a kiswa was not only a matter of rivalry between heads of state but also led to disputes among the pilgrimage amirs. An incident that took place in 1342 is a remarkable example of such a rivalry. In that year, the Damascus pilgrimage amir, 'Alā al-Dīn ibn Gurlu, arrived in Mecca with pilgrims from Aleppo and Safed, and he covered the Ka'ba with the kiswa he brought with him. However, this was an interference with the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan and the duty of the amir. Moreover, the Egyptian pilgrims had covered the Ka'ba in their own kisas the day before. The details of the event highlight that the number of Damascus pilgrims that year was greater than that of the Egyptians, which can be seen as an explanation for 'Alā al-Dīn ibn Gurlu's bold move (al-Jazīrī 2002; Erol 2020; 1994–1997). This conflict should be viewed not only as a division of sacred duties but also as a reflection of regional power struggles.

Although the role and meaning of the kiswa as a symbol of religious greatness has always continued, studies have considered the Mamlūk period more special. It is stated that the role and meaning of the kiswa increased even more and reached its peak in this period (Dekkiche 2015). The fact that the Mamlūk sultans were of slave origin also played a role in this because they needed some additional practices to ensure their legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims. Re-establishing the Abbāsīd caliphate in Egypt was one of the steps they took for this purpose (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 1, pp. 530–31).

6.6. The Competition Between the Ottoman and Certain Arab Groups

The Ottoman Empire dominated the Hejaz for centuries and, therefore, undertook the services of the Haramayn. However, various uprisings in the Arab world led to these services being used as a tool to challenge Ottoman authority. In this context, the Ottoman-Wahhabi conflicts serve as a striking example. The political and military tensions during the Wahhabi movement had a direct impact on the sending of the Ka'ba's kiswa, and the Wahhabis rejected the kiswa to challenge the Ottoman rule over the Haramayn (Ateş 1981).

Another significant event was the actions of the Egyptian Khedive regarding the kiswa. In 1908, the Khedive of Egypt aimed to send a political message by changing the Ka'ba cover sent on behalf of the Ottoman Empire to his name. This development drew the reaction of the Ottoman Empire and demonstrated once again that the kiswa was not only a religious ritual but also a tool of diplomacy. This initiative of the khedive was carefully monitored by the Ottoman administration and was quickly denied, as it could damage the religious and political authority of the Ottomans in the Islamic world. Particularly, such interventions underline that the kiswa was not only a matter of worship but also a symbol of prestige and authority (Civelek 2012).

7. Conclusions

In this article, after briefly discussing the definition of the *kiswa*, the materials from which it is produced and how it is financed, the history of the *kiswa* tradition is brought to the present day, starting from the pre-Islamic period, and then the cover's becoming a religious symbol and then a political symbol are discussed under separate headings. The article particularly focuses on the competing states within the Islamic states in terms of sending *kiswa*. The article deals with this issue separately, which sultans made diplomatic attempts on this issue, whether they could compromise or not, and the prominence of the meaning of political authority in these relations.

According to the findings obtained, the *kiswa*, as a cover that was draped over the Ka'ba before Islam, has been a unique symbol reflecting both the religious and political layers of Islamic history, to which the people of Hejaz have paid attention since the Jāhiliyya period and the entire Islamic world with the Islamic period. With its spiritual dimension, it represents the respect for the Ka'ba and devotion to Allāh, and with the verses embroidered on it, it is a tool that constantly reminds of the belief in *tawhid*. In addition to being a religious ritual, the renewal of the *kiswa* is also an expression of the efforts of the states representing the authority throughout history to present themselves as servants to the Islamic *ummah*. Examples of this are discussed in the article, and it is seen how diligent Muslim statesmen are in serving the holy cities.

In addition to its deep religious meaning, the *kiswa* has played an important role throughout history as a reflection of leadership claims, authority, and political rivalries. The *kiswa* has been a diplomatic tool that reinforces the power of states and leaders, rather than a means of obtaining Allāh's approval. Throughout various periods of Islamic history, especially from the Abbāsīd period onwards when multiple political actors were on the scene, the sending and covering of the *kiswa* has been used by states to emphasize their religious and political influence. In this context, incidents such as the Abbāsīds' conflict with the Fatimids, the Mamlūks' conflict with the Rasulids, the Ilkhanids, and the Timurids, the competition among the local amirs during the Mamlūk period, the struggle for leadership in the Haramayn services during the Ottoman period, and the Wahhabi movement, all illustrate the immense political significance carried by the Ka'ba's covering. As can be seen, the role and meaning of the *kiswa* in becoming a political symbol has always continued and reached its peak especially during the Mamlūk period. The fact that the Mamlūks were of slave origin and their concerns about establishing legitimacy over the Islamic society must have influenced them to attach particular importance to this issue.

In the research conducted, it has been observed that the sultans consulted with committees consisting of competent persons, especially chief *qādī*, instead of making the final decision directly when there was a religious issue in the cases related to the *kiswa*. An example of this is the Timurid ruler Shahrukh's sending the Ka'ba cover as a vow. At the meeting organized in this regard, the covering was not permitted, despite the fact that it was a vow. A similar situation had previously occurred with the vow of the Ilkhanid vizier Ali Shah. Ali Shah wanted to hang two rings on the Ka'ba on the grounds that it was his vow. Initially, there was hesitation regarding this request, but it was allowed for a short time. However, the same concession was not made for the vow of the *kiswa*. This situation shows that the political meaning attributed to the cover of the Ka'ba was far superior. Another issue that needs to be addressed here is the distinction between inner and outer *kiswa*, which Dekkiche draws attention to in his study. Dekkiche states that the hanging of Shahrukh's cover inside the Ka'ba is not taken into account by the secondary sources and that this is an important detail in understanding the subject. Although this distinction is recognised when the primary sources are carefully examined, it is noteworthy that the researcher examines it in detail and draws attention to it for modern research.

In conclusion, the *kiswa* appears to be a powerful tool that parallels examples such as the Vatican and Jerusalem, where religious symbolism is intertwined with political authority. Like these places, the Ka'ba has been used throughout history not only as a spiritual centre but also as a means of representation and legitimacy of political power. Investigating the local meanings that the *kiswa* has acquired in different geographies in the historical process and the effects of these meanings on the socio-political structures of Muslim societies offers a wide field for future studies. Such comparative and local analyses can open up a broader discussion on the effects of religious symbols on issues of social cohesion, representation, and authority in the modern world. The story of the *kiswa* should be seen as an important field of study in order to understand how this symbolism, which extends from history to the present day, shapes the relationship between religion and politics. It is believed that today's researchers examining the political meanings of religious symbols or rituals that have transformed over time will make it easier to understand the causes and consequences of many practices. It is hoped that this article will guide studies in this field.

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Notes

- ¹ This sanctity is particularly associated with the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: 'One sets out to visit only three masjids: Masjid al-Harām, Masjid al-Aqsā and this mosque of mine' (al-Bukhārī 2001). In the section "Fadlu al-Salāti fī Masjid al-Mecca wa al-Medīna, 6" of al-Bukhārī's book.
- ² The city of Mecca is located in a valley known as Batnimecca (Bekke) in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The real importance of Mecca and its surroundings, which are described in the Qur'an as 'a valley where crops do not grow' (Q. 14:37), stems from the fact that the Ka'ba, the first temple built for the purpose of worshipping Allāh, is located here. In the Qur'an, it is pointed out that Mecca and its surroundings, where the Ka'ba, which is accepted as the house of Allāh, is located, is a safe place protected from all kinds of encroachment and a place where people are spiritually cleansed and purified, and some provisions have been made regarding this area and its boundaries have also been determined (Bozkurt and Küçükaşçı 2003b). The area within these borders determined by The Prophet Muhammad was called "haram" because it was forbidden to kill any living creature except pests and to damage vegetation within these borders (Öğüt 1997).
- ³ In Islamic sources, Medina is referred to by several names, including *Tayyiba*, *Miskīna*, *Azra*, *Dār al-Hijra*, *Dār al-Iman*, *Dār al-Sunnah*, *Medīnat al-Rasūl*, *Madīnat al-Nabī*, and *al-Medīna al-Munawwara*. These names generally emphasize the city's sanctity, its role as the destination of migration (hijra) and its capital, and the civilization that developed after the hijra. Medina, which is one of the two Haram (Haramayn) along with Mecca, is considered to have been conquered by the Qur'an because it was the land of migration and its people adopted Islam without any coercion, and after the migration, the city's harem status was declared by the Prophet Muhammad by saying "Ibrahim made Mecca sacred (haram), and I made Medina sacred (haram)" (al-Bukhārī 2001; Bozkurt and Küçükaşçı 2003a).
- ⁴ Jerusalem, located on the undulating surface of the Judean Plateau to the west of the area where the Dead Sea depression is situated, is considered a sacred city by all three Abrahamic faiths. In Judaism, it holds the highest value and symbolizes the greatest hopes due to being chosen by God. It is also the site of Jewish pilgrimage. The significance of Jerusalem in Jewish worship is based on the belief that the Messiah will establish the Jewish state in this land. In the Christian scriptures, the Gospels also place significant importance on Jerusalem. According to the Gospels, the earthly life of Jesus ends in Jerusalem, and the apostles receive the "Holy Spirit" there. In Islam, Jerusalem is regarded as one of the three holy cities. However, the name Jerusalem is not directly mentioned in the Qur'an; rather, it is referred to as the blessed surroundings of the al-Aqsā Mosque. Al-Aqsā Mosque is also mentioned in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad as one of the three mosques on earth that should be visited (Harman 2002).

- 5 In the section “Salāt 31” “Tafsīr 18” of al-Bukhārī’s book.
- 6 Yüksel has analyzed the narrations on this subject in detail. It is recommended that those interested consult the article, as it would exceed the limits of the subject (Yüksel 2023).
- 7 The Jurhums are an Arab tribe originally from the southern Arabs who lived in Mecca in the time of Ishmael, the son of Prophet Abraham, and who ruled the Ka’ba one generation after Ishmael (Önkal 1993).
- 8 Although there are some disputes about the origin of this tribe, it is more likely to be from the southern Arabs like the Jurhums, the Arab tribe that defeated the Jurhums and took over the administration of Ka’ba (Önkal 1998).
- 9 Tubba’ is a title given to the kings of ancient Yemen (Harman 2012).
- 10 The covering is recorded to have been made of yellow silk (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 43).
- 11 Surra is a term that refers to the goods and gifts sent to the Haremāyn during the pilgrimage season (Buzpınar 2009).
- 12 “Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and maintaining the Sacred Mosque the same as believing in Allah and the Last Day and striving in Allah’s path? They are not equal in Allah’s sight. Allah does not guide the unjust people”. (Q. 9:19) The meanings of this verse and the following verses are taken from Itani’s *Qur’ān English Translation* (Itani 2012).
- 13 In the section “Imāra 111” of Muslim’s book.
- 14 The subject of the pilgrimage of Shajarāt al-Durr and the mahmal he sent has been the subject of a study and the appearance of women in this area has been examined with examples from Islamic history. For detailed information, see (Behrens-Abouseif 1997).
- 15 In pilgrimage, there is tawāf al-quḍūm upon arrival in Mecca, tawāf al-ziyārah after ‘Arafat as one of the three obligatory pillars of pilgrimage (entering ihrām, performing waqf at Arafat, and performing tawāf al-ziyārah), and tawāf wada’ as the last tawāf before leaving Mecca. In minor pilgrimage, the tawāf of ‘umrah is performed (Ögüt 2011).
- 16 “(28) That they may witness the benefits for themselves, and celebrate the name of Allah during the appointed days, for providing them with the animals livestock. (29) Then let them perform their acts of cleansing, and fulfill their vows, and circle around the Ancient House. (30) All that. Whoever venerates the sanctities of Allah-it is good for him with his Lord. All livestock are permitted to you, except what is recited to you. So stay away from the abomination of idols, and stay away from perjury. (31) Being true to Allah, without associating anything with Him. Whoever associates anything with Allah-it is as though he has fallen from the sky, and is snatched by the birds, or is swept away by the wind to a distant abyss. (32) So it is. Whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah-it is from the piety of the hearts. (33) In them are benefits for you until a certain time. Then their place is by the Ancient House.” (Q. 22:28–33)
- 17 The meaning of khutba is “a speech addressed to the congregation during the performance of some worship and ceremonies, especially Friday and Eid prayers” and it is important whose name is mentioned in these speeches. It is understood that the person whose name is mentioned in the sermon holds authority in that place (Baktır 1998).
- 18 This cover is described in detail. The square-shaped covering was made of red dibāj. There were twelve crescents on the edges. Inside each crescent there was a golden orange and inside each orange there were 50 pearls the size of pigeon eggs. This cover was decorated with red, yellow and blue rubies and there were verses about pilgrimage written in emeralds around it (al-Maqrīzī 1996).
- 19 Vowing (adaq) is a form of worship for which a person makes himself responsible with his own oath, even though he is not religiously responsible (Özel 1988).
- 20 However, according to a piece of information provided by Ibn Hajar regarding the events of 828 (1425), gifts were sent from Egypt to Shahrūkh, and at the same time, a response was given to Shahrūkh’s previous request to send a covering for the Ka’ba to be hung inside (Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986). Researchers have identified that this narration does not appear in any other sources (Kanat 1996).
- 21 However, news reached Egypt in the month of Dhu al-Qa’dah that Shahrūkh’s covering had been sent. It seems that the covering was sent before the response to the decision made at the beginning of the year had reached him (Ibn Hajar al-Āsḡalānī 1986, vol. 8, pp. 355–56).

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