



## Stories from the Hijaz

### THE MAKKAH CHRONICLES



# The history of the door to Allah's House

**SALIM PARKER**

THE door of the Kaabah rises above the ground level of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, with about two metres and 20 centimetres separating it from the floor.

The door is 3,18 metres high and 1,71 metres wide. This is according to the family entrusted to look after the Kaabah, the al-Shaibi family who are the custodians of the Kaabah.

Very little documentary evidence of the history of the door is available and some consider this to be one of the unknown aspects of the Kaabah. There is no documentation of its initial shape, what it was made of, who built it over the ages or what its builders looked like.

There is, however, one indisputable historical fact: the Kaabah had two doors for a long time. Some say that it even had a window for a while.

The current door is the legacy of Shaikh Ahmad bin Ibrahim Badr, the chief artist who recast the golden door of the Kaabah. He made the door using 300 kilograms of pure gold at the orders of King Khaled, in October 1979. The work was carried out at a workshop prepared exclusively for the project.

He also refurbished the meezab (the spout on the roof of the Kaabah) and the Hajaratul Aswad's (Black Stone) silver frame. He learnt this art from his father, Shaikh Ibrahim Badr, who originally designed and built the door when King Abdul Aziz ordered him to do so, in 1942. He joined his father's workshop at the age of 15 to continue an art form that the family was famous for.

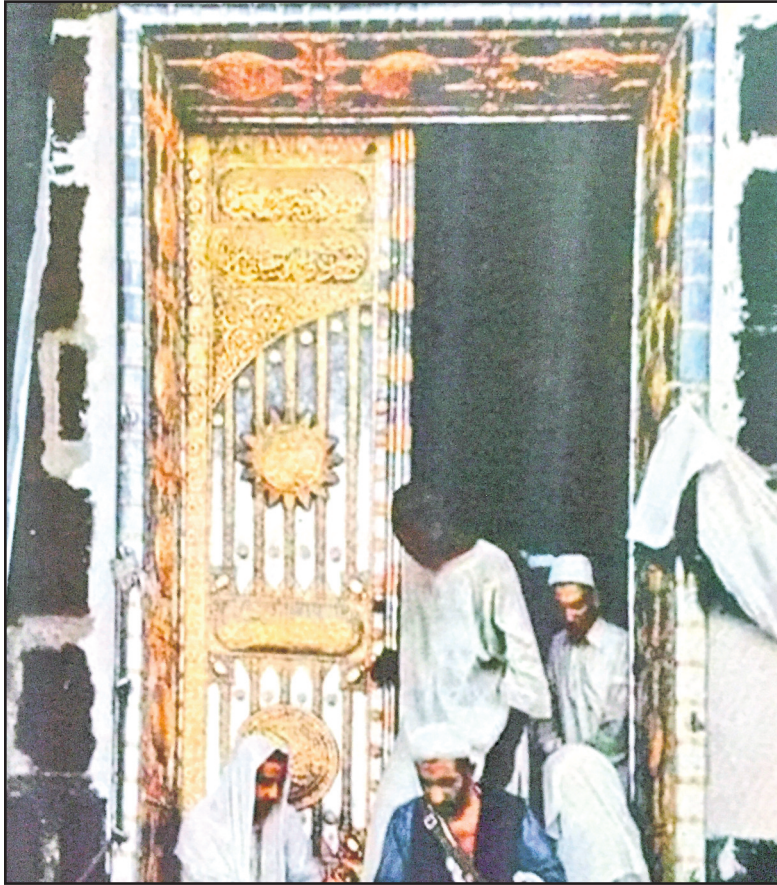
In 1977, the then King Khalid noticed scratches at the bottom of the door while he was praying inside the Grand Mosque. He immediately ordered that the door be remade and for a Taubah (repentance) door to be installed and coated with gold.

Ahmad and two relatives, Mahmoud and Ibrahim Badr, cast the door in pure gold, taking a full year to complete the work. The interior pillars and the meezab, made with 25 kilograms of 24-carat gold, were also completed during that time.

The duah, 'Ya Hayy Ya Qayyum' (O the Living, O the Lasting), verses of the Holy Quran are inscribed on the door. The words 'Allah' and 'Muhammad' were also inscribed on the door. Ahmed died at the age of 89, in Makkah, in 2009.

It is generally believed that when Prophet Ibrahim (AS) built the Kaabah, the two openings were on ground level. Worshipers could enter from the eastern opening and exited through the western one. The current door is on the eastern side.

The door remained on the original eastern side until the Quraish rebuilt the Kaabah after it was



In the past, pilgrims were allowed to enter the Kaabah, as can be seen in this scene, where they are leaving Allah's House.

Photo courtesy SAUDI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

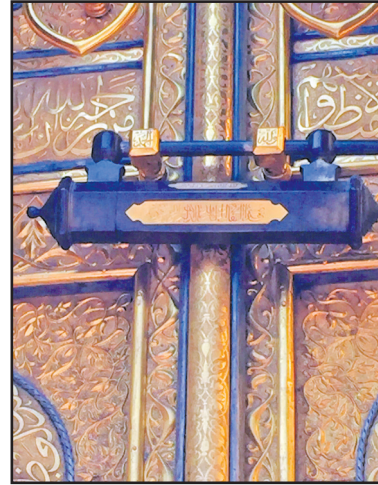
damaged. They raised it above the ground during the reconstruction phase. It is not known whether or when the western door was removed.

Sayyida Aisha (RA) once asked the Prophet (SAW) why the Quraish had raised the door above the ground. The Prophet (SAW) replied: 'Your people did it so that they could permit into the Kaabah only those people whom they approved of and could prevent those

whom they pleased.

'Had your people not been recently removed from ignorance and had I not feared that they would be averse to change, I would have included the Hateem within the Kaabah and brought the door level with the ground.'

The Syrian army destroyed the Kaabah in the 64th year after Hijrah. Ibn az-Zubayr wanted to change the Kaabah to how Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had



The Kaabah door has been replaced a few times but the lock is relatively unchanged.  
Photo SALIM PARKER



wanted it, on the foundation built by Prophet Ibrahim (AS). According to reports, he built it with two doors on ground level and added the Hateem area to it.

In the 74th year after Hijrah (693 AD), Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi, demolished what Ibn az-Zubayr had added to it from the older foundation. He restored the old Quraish structure, which resulted in an elevated, single eastern door, and the Hateem area removed.

Abbasid Khalifa Harun al Rasheed wanted to rebuild the Kaabah the way Prophet Muhammad (SAW) wanted and the way Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr had built it.

However, when he consulted Imam Malik, the imam advised him not to proceed as the constant demolition and rebuilding is not respectful and each future ruler would want to put his own personal stamp on it. He accepted Imam Malik's advice and the

structure has remained more or less the same since then.

Some sources claim that, in the past, the Holy Kaabah was opened twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.

According to Abdul Aziz, the Holy Kaabah was kept open three times a month for people to enter and pray inside. However, when the number of people seeking to enter it increased, it was stopped.

Now, it is opened only twice a year for cleaning, and it is done in an Islamic ceremony and in the presence of a large number of officials as well as the ambassadors and consuls of Islamic countries and other guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

The Kaabah is washed with Zam-zam, rose water and oud.

The key of the Kaabah does not necessarily change when the door is changed. During the time of King Khaled, even though the door was changed, the key was not changed.



The current door is on the eastern side of the Kaabah but pilgrims are no longer allowed to enter. Nowadays, the inside of the Kaabah is only seen by dignitaries and guests when it is being cleaned, which happens twice a year.  
Photo SALIM PARKER