
PILGRIMAGE, POLITICS, AND MARITIME POWER OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY THROUGH THE LENS OF BAYAZID BEG'S HAJJ ACCOUNT

Sana Ahmad*

Centre of Advance Study, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh UP India

***Corresponding author E-mail:** ahmadsana00095@gmail.com<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23152841>**ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the study of the Hajj narrative of Bayazid Beg Biyat, a sixteenth-century Mughal courtier, as preserved in the Tadhkira-i-Humayun wa Akbar. Despite extensive diplomatic and commercial activity between Mughal India and the broader Islamic world, first-person accounts of pilgrimage from South Asia before 1700 remain exceptionally rare. This study addresses the following research questions: how does Bayazid's account illuminate the entanglement of pilgrimage with Mughal imperial authority, regional politics, and Portuguese maritime control? Methodologically, this research employs critical source analysis, situating Bayazid's text within the traditions of Indo-Persian travel writings and chronicler accounts. It integrates the question: in what ways does his narrative challenge or confirm prevailing historiographical claims regarding the paucity and nature of early South Asian Hajj writing? This article combines a close reading of the text with a comparative evaluation of recent scholarly works, assessing both the evidentiary value and limitations of Bayazid's account. Bayazid's Hajj narrative was not just personal testimony but also a window onto the political, social, and religious dynamics of the Mughal Empire.

Keywords: Hajj, Bayazid Beg, maritime voyage, Portuguese, Akbar

1. INTRODUCTION

The Hajj in the Mughal period was not merely an act of personal devotion. It was also influenced by imperial politics, maritime instability, and the disputed control over oceanic routes. Looking at the Hajj through the eyes of a Mughal courtier provides a unique window into the complex relationship between religion, diplomacy, and power, as recounted by Bayazid Beg on his journey to Mecca. His account shows that reaching the Hijaz from Mughal India was dependent on several factors, including religious devotion and royal approval, port accessibility, bureaucratic discussions, the dangers of maritime passage, and Portuguese meddling in the western Indian Ocean. One of the finest and most comprehensive descriptions of the Hajj from the Mughal era can be found in Bayazid Beg Turkman's 'Tadhkira yi Humayun wa Akbar'. It deals with the narrative histories of Mughal Emperors Humayun and Akbar from 940-999 AH / 1542-1590 CE and provides a valuable firsthand account of political, social, and diplomatic affairs of the sixteenth century [1]. Bayazid's account is historically valuable precisely because so few such primary works exist from the period. In this paper, we try to prove the evidentiary value of rare documents through historiographical comparison and genre analysis to place Bayazid's work within broader patterns of travel writing and historical chronicle.

Bayazid provides details about the routes of the western Indian Ocean and Surat Port (Bandar-i-Mubarak, a blessed port) that facilitated the journey to embark on the Hajj through the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea. He discussed the interactions with sailors, traders, and pilgrims, including piracy, shipwrecks, and natural calamities [2]. Hence, his voyage blended devotion, politics, and diplomacy in one of his chapters of his account. The narrative of it was positioned as a minor but illustrative contribution to the Indo-Persian tradition of 'voyages to the Hijaz'. In comparison to more reflective or accomplished travel writers like 'Abdur Razzaq Samargandi, Bayazid's account is considered less literary and more episodic but still valuable for its vignettes of maritime, political, and religious life.

Bayazid Beg was a member of the Turanian elite within the Mughal court. Abul Fazl, court historian of Akbar's period, listed him as 'great in one of the eternal realms' (buzurgan-i-javed-dawlat) and thought he was a man of reputation but not of a great rank [3]. He had served the Mughal for more than three decades in military campaigns, as a chief confidant of the Mun'im Khan, the noble and commander of Akbar's eastern campaigns, and was assigned land assessment and revenue tasks. After Mun'im Khan's death, he was made Dārogha of the imperial treasury [4]. Bayazid's Tadhkira-i-Humayun wa Akbar (1591-92CE), composed orally and later transcribed in Persian by a scribe, serves as a 'feeder text' to Abul Fazl's imperial Akbar Nama [5]. Bayazid served the Mughal emperors Humayun and Akbar for over fifty years before requesting permission to depart on the Hajj in 1678 CE. He focuses on Humayun's exile in Persia and later efforts to regain the Mughal throne [6]. His work shows the military challenges, strategies, and alliances that defined Emperor Humayun's and Akbar's reign. Bayazid also offers an understanding of Mughal court life, customs, and traditions.

2. BAYAZID'S DEPARTURE AND IMPERIAL PERMISSION:

In the year 1578 CE, Bayazid Beg was granted permission to undertake the Hajj pilgrimage by Emperor Akbar, acknowledging his nearly fifty years of service to the Mughal Empire. In 1577 CE, corresponding to Muharram 985 AH, after assuming the role of treasury supervisor (dārogha) in Fatehpur Sikri, where he diligently fulfilled duties. In the subsequent year, in 1578 CE (Muharram 986 AH), he faced challenges when allegations arose regarding the transport of gold and jewels from the imperial treasury. Nawab Qilich Khan, governor of Gujarat, and his brother, Farman Ali Shan Shaadat, detained him, prompting a thorough two-year investigation. During the meticulous investigation and examination

of financial records, they were fined a total of 100,000 in cash and goods. A comprehensive report was submitted to Fatehpur Sikri, where the emperor legitimised 100,000 for an individual planning to embark on the Hajj pilgrimage. Ultimately, investigation confirmed that he had no ulterior motive for undertaking the Hajj journey, and his journey was obstructed by others [7]. This episode demonstrates that even a pious journey undertaken with imperial approval could become entangled in the politics of suspicion. Wealth and provincial authority. The Hajj, in this sense, was not outside the bureaucratic and political structures of the Mughal state, as it was often influenced by the state's interests of the need for imperial oversight in religious matters.

3. PORTUGUESE CONTROL, CARTAZ, AND THE PILGRIM ROUTE:

On the 11th of March, 1880 CE (24th Muharram 988 AH), he boarded the Surat-based ship 'Muhammadi' with his children and wife. This ship was built by Nawab Qilich Khan and his brother Qutb al-Din Khan (chief commandant of the Sarkar of Bharoch in Gujarat) [8]. Bayazid Beg began his journey at the Surat port of Gujarat, a key hub of commerce and pilgrimage. Pilgrims faced difficulties at Daman and Diu's inlet (Khurband), one of the vital ports on the western coast of the Indian Ocean. The area was under the control of the Portuguese, and they demanded the custom duties or cartaz. The issue was that there was no fixed amount of tax. Bayazid Beg's eldest son Sa'adat Yār was asked to handle the matter because he had knowledge of the Hindawī and Firangī (Hindi and Portuguese) languages, and Bayazid remarked that his two younger sons Iftikhar and Dhu'al-fiqar could be taken as hostage if necessary [9].

Subsequently, Iftikhar was detained as a restraint since their demands were fulfilled. Sa'adat Yār negotiated with them on behalf of the customs of the board members of the ship, and they fixed the amount of the 10,000 mahmudis [10]. Bayazid Beg gave the Mahmudis coins as a benevolent loan to get back the hostage in the ship that would proceed to Jaddah. No one possessed a single Mahmudi coin to secure the release of the Musalmans from the hands of Firangi. The number of customs duties was given to Tejpal, who was a Chaudhari of the port and carried the ship with Hasan Chanu, who was the Nakhuda (superintendent) of the Ship of Surat. After paying the Cartaz, they released Iftikhar [11]. This incident is central to the article's argument. It shows that the Mughal Hajj route by sea was mediated by Portuguese naval authority, especially at choke points such as Daman and Diu. Pilgrimage, therefore, was not only a matter of religious intention; it also required negotiation with a competing maritime power that controlled access, imposed duties, and could delay or disrupt the movement of pilgrims. Bayazid's experiences at Surat, Daman, and Diu illuminate the geopolitical realities of the western Indian Ocean. The narrative demonstrates that the logistics of the Hajj were deeply affected by Portuguese maritime dominance, fluctuating customs duties, and the need for diplomatic negotiation—reinforcing arguments by scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam on the fraught politics of Indian Ocean mobility. The episode with the cartaz, hostage-taking, and ransom payment highlights the vulnerability of even high-status pilgrims to extraterritorial forces and the importance of linguistic and diplomatic skills in negotiating safe passage.

Abul Fazl, the court historian of Emperor Akbar, also referred to the Portuguese as a major obstacle and called them 'Amirs of the Islands of the Firangis' and 'lamented their interference in pilgrimage travel in Hijaz' [12]. Initially, Mughal-Portuguese relations were amicable. However, tensions grow over time due to the Portuguese's interference in the trade pilgrims' routes, which disrupted the established trade networks and angered the Mughal Empire. In April 1582 CE, Akbar ordered an army to fight a battle near Daman. The Mughals were defeated on the battlefield due to the Portuguese's strong military strength on the western coast [13].

He navigates through the Arabian Sea by crossing the Indian Ocean and reaching the port of Aden (a port in Yemen, a gateway between the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea). Bayazid Beg reached the land and hills of Aden within a fortnight, under favourable winds, on March 18, 1680 CE (1 Safar, 988 AH). Here, they received news that their ship had encountered the vessel carrying royal Mughal women, including Gulbadan Bano Begum, Akbar's aunt; Salima Sultana, widow of Bairam Khan and Akbar's wife; and others, who went on Hajj before him in 1576 CE. These women returned to their empire from their pious journey [14].

Their ship was about to sail into the Red Sea. Bayazid instructed Nakhuda (master or captain) and pilot (Mu'allim) to slow the sail (awzar) of the ship so that he could write a petition (arzadasht) addressed to the begums of the Mughal court. In this petition, he included detailed information about the ship and fellow travelers going to Hijaz and the hurdles they were facing in Surat and Daman. Royal women and Khwaja (a religious and respected court member) praised Bayazid and said, 'God's mercy upon him for writing so elegantly about the ship affairs.' Bayazid got the return response from the royal ladies while he was in the Hijaz. He also appreciated the acknowledgement of the emperor for his wisdom in his writings. However, the delay turned out to be a blessing to perform Hajj [15]. The exchange with the royal women is significant because it indicates that the Hajj was embedded in networks of imperial communication. Bayazid's journey was not an isolated devotional act; it remained connected to the Mughal court through letters, petitions, and the circulation of news across the sea.

4. DEVOTION, SERVICE, AND STATUS IN THE SACRED CITIES:

Bayazid's experience in Mecca reflects an important overlap between piety and prestige. His participation in the maintenance of the sacred precinct and his charitable distribution of wealth allowed him to present himself not merely as a pilgrim but as a Mughal notable whose devotion found expression through service, patronage, and visible generosity in the holy city [16]. During his stay of three years, he lost his beloved wife and youngest son, Dul'al-fiqar. He bought land for his wife's and son's cenotaphs (got-*khāna*) in Mu'alla [17] from the Sharif of Mecca. He gave 3,000 Ibrahimis [18], as a gift to Sharif. Other than that, he presented many jewels and goods from India that were costly, including elaborate

necklaces, precious stones, and textiles that showcased the wealth and craftsmanship of the region. He also performed numerous favours for Sharif and other Mecca officials. Bayazid prepared another grave for himself, facing his beloved wife, in the hope that God had exalted him. He decided that he would spend the rest of his life in Mecca [19]. Thus, he describe his Hajj pilgrimage journey, during which he experiences the intersection of religious favour, personal loss, and status in the sacred lands of Mecca and Medina.

5. THE RETURN VOYAGE, THE POLITICS OF DELAY, AND THE INSECURITY OF OCEANIC ROUTES:

He decided to spend the remainder of his life in Mecca. But destiny or fate were different in ways. However, in 1582 CE (990 AH), news reached him that his children, who were returning from Mecca to India, were captured by the Portuguese at the port of Daman while Bayazid was performing his supererogatory Hajj [20]. Bayazid reported that they had sailed to Gujarat at the end of 1582 CE. All this happened when the Portuguese defeated a Mughal force under Qutb al-Din Khan, which attacked Daman on the 5th of April 1582 CE [21]. His sons were released soon from captivity. They were in the Mughal court, and from there, they wrote to Bayazid in Surat that they were safe [22].

Hence, he decided that he should return to India. It was not a sailing season; he could not voyage from al-Shihr or Zufar (in Yemen). He waited four months and travelled from the port of Mukallā (a port city in Hadramout). When he arrived in Al-Shihr, he also received news from Gujarat that Muzaffar Khan Gujarati had raised a rebellion. Bayazid gives a detailed account of this rebellion [23].

On his return journey, he faced delays and challenges. Bayazid had to wait four months for safe navigation before favourable winds arrived. He departed from the port of Mukallā to the Indian Ocean, then to Al-Shihr, where the winds become more severe. From there, they sailed eastwards along the coast to Dhofar (or Zufar, in Oman) and then into the Arabian Sea. He and other passengers of the ship were stuck at the coastline of the Zufar port for eight months due to the politically unstable situation in Gujarat, which hindered their ability to continue their journey and affected trade routes in the region, leading to significant delays in the plans and economic losses for those dependent on maritime trade. He finally returned to Surat in 1584 CE [24]. Therefore, Bayazid mentioned that the southwest monsoon in the Arabian Sea was transferred around May 1583 CE. The Aden port and the Red Sea were closed due to adverse weather conditions. However, the strong westerly wind blew from Zufar (in Oman), preventing the monsoon from closing Indian ports. This situation ultimately enabled him to make his way back to India. In the sixteenth century, navigation was done by complex maritime routes through the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf as well as by the sufficiency of the port system. This delay underlines how pilgrimage from Mughal India depends not only on imperial permission and material resources but also on seasonal navigation, regional instability, and the vulnerability of the ships to political disruption.

Bayazid's account of the return journey connects the Mughal conquest of Gujarat with the challenges faced by travelers undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage, illustrating the interplay between politics, faith, and maritime activities. Muzaffar Khan's rebellion in 1583 (Muharram 991 AH) in Gujarat disrupted travelers during this period. Emperor Akbar appointed Abd al-Rahim Khan khana to confront Muzaffar Khan. Muzaffar fortified himself in Champaner (situated between Baroda and Baroch). The news of rebellion spread among the crew of the ship. Bayazid interprets how the news lets the boatswain (tandle) and sailors (khalasian) see the rebellion as a direct threat to their safety or see it as an opportunity to assert their readiness to defend their vessel by arming themselves. They were in solidarity with Muzaffar's cause because Abd al-Rahim Khan had defeated Sultan Muzaffar Khan outside Ahmadabad on the 25th of January 1584 CE [25].

Bayazid shares his companionship in the cuddy (a small cabin on the ship) with Mirza Nur al-Din Muhammad [26]. Both shone in intellectual as well as spiritual aspects. They possess a copy of the 'Diwan of Hafiz', a collection of mystical poetry highly regarded for its spiritual insights and its use to seek insight or deliver warning. Bayazid uses the poetical lines of the Diwan of Hafiz to answer the question that arises regarding Sultan Muzaffar's success. The line of the couplet was

'Seek domination from the imperial bird [hūmā, the bird of Humāyūn] and its shadow,

For neither crow nor kite possesses the royal feather [the long wing-feather of courage] [27].

He interprets it as an omen or as a negative sign. The poetry convinced the passengers that Muzaffar's rebellion was doomed to fail. This moment reveals that political uncertainty at sea was interpreted not only through news and strategy, but also through literary and spiritual practices. The use of Hafiz shows how educated Mughal travelers drew upon poetic and mystical traditions to make sense of unfolding political events.

Bayazid stayed on the ship for eight months, and he came ashore twice for the prayers of Eid al-Fitr (the celebration after Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (the occasion of sacrifice). His presence on the ship played a role in providing a shield for the ship and its passengers. His influence prevented the people of Shihr and Zufar from seizing the vessel and plundering its cargo. Which consisted of pilgrims' goods and personal belongings [28].

His narrative about the Sufi saints, like Sayyid Abā Bakr, who was raised in Hadramaut, was regarded as the great mystic of his time, as mentioned in Bayazid's work. The group of people urged Bayazid to meet him, but he declined, fearing his presence might disrupt Sayyid's spiritual devotion. The group of pilgrims discussed his message to Sayyid while they met with him. On that, Sayyid expresses his salutation and acknowledges his mystical bonds regardless of direct interaction. Sayyid also shared his vision of the profound revelation of Emperor Akbar:

"You are free to express the salutation of Bayazid, who has stayed behind on the ship. I have been acquainted with him for a long while."

"Last night, I met with him [Bayazid] in the dream and Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar, the Emperor of India, and offered him protection" [29]

The episode highlights that Bayazid's Hajj was shaped not only by political and maritime realities, but also by a transregional sacred world of dreams, saints, and scholarly association.

Bayazid and other companions on the ship were disembarked from Gogha Port and imprisoned. Their items, which were meant for Emperor Akbar and other people of India, were seized. They were released from imprisonment when Muzaffar Khan was captured from the forest in 1584 CE. Then he set for the port of Surat [30]. Despite his innocence, he was imprisoned and his goods were stolen. Hence, his narrative on his travel highlights his perilous nature, which was reflected in the political conflicts, betrayal, and personal hardship on his pious journey of Hajj.

When he reached Surat, he remained there for one year because the climate suited him, and he had no ties. Bayazid's sons asked him not to prolong his stay in Surat because it was not safe, especially due to the ongoing political unrest and threats in the region. Then he set out for the imperial court. The episode of Hajj's journey ended after six years. After his return, he got the job of supervisor in the court. He got the pargana of Sunam in Panjab. Later, he got a land grant in Lahore, where he used to build a haveli (mansion). He also built a well, a bridge, and a couple of mosques. One stone inscription describes him as "the Hajji of knowing heart... valiant in the work of God" [31]. His post-pilgrimage reintegration into Mughal service suggests that the Hajj enhanced, rather than diminished, his status as a courtly figure whose religious devotion remained compatible with imperial service.

6. CONCLUSION

Bayazid Beg's Hajj narrative reveals that pilgrimage in the Mughal world cannot be understood as an exclusively private act of devotion; his account demonstrates that the journey to Mecca was shaped by imperial service, provincial authority, maritime geography, Portuguese interference, and the unstable politics of Gujarat. At the same time, the narrative preserves the deeply personal dimensions of the Hajj, including charity, sacred service, grief, and the desire for burial in the holy city. All together, these elements make Bayazid's account an important source for understanding how piety, empire, and oceanic mobility intersected in the sixteenth-century Mughal world.

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
9. *Tadhkira-yi-Humāyūn wa Akbar*, p. 355.
10. *Maḥmūdī* was the commercial silver coinage of Gujarat. Current from before the recent Mughal annexation, considerably lighter than the Mughal silver rupee, at this period weighing c. 7.1 g; see J.S. Deyell, "The development of Akbar's currency system and monetary integration of the conquered kingdoms", in J.F. Richard, ed., *The Monetary System of Mughal India*, Delhi, 1987, p. 27.
11. *Tadhkira-yi-Humāyūn wa Akbar*, p. 355; Simon, "Bāyazīd Beg Turkmān's Pilgrimage to Mecca and Return to Gujarat", p. 165.
12. Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, Vol. III, p. 145.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.
14. *Tadhkira-yi-Humāyūn wa Akbar*, pp. 355-6.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
17. The Jannat al-Mu'alla is the cemetery near the Ka'ba in which the Prophet's mother, Bibi Amna; his wife, Hazrat Khadija; and many of his companions are buried; see Simon, "Bāyazīd Beg Turkman's Pilgrimage to Mekka and Return to Gujarat", p. 174 n. 2.

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22. *Tadhkira Yi Humāyūn wa Akbar*, p. 363.
23. Muzaffar Khan III, the last independent Sultan of Gujarat, in 1572, committed suicide in 1592 after being captured by the Mughals; see Simon, "Bāyazīd Beg Turkman", p. 159.
24. *Tadhkira-yi-Humāyūn wa Akbar*, pp. 359-61.
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