Henri Chambert-Loir (ed.)
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The pilgrimage to Mecca is a religious duty for all Muslims who are able to perform it, and throughout history many believers have taken this obligation seriously, and indeed for many Muslims the hajj is one of the greatest experiences in their lives. The hajj forms a fascinating topic for study, because in addition to being a vital religious event it encompasses a wide range of social, psychological, political, sanitary, literary, artistic, logistic, organizational, and other issues.

The present work, Making the Hajj in the Past. Stories of Indonesian Pilgrims, 1482–1962, forms a most welcome addition to this interesting field of study. As its title indicates, it concentrates on the personal accounts of Indonesian pilgrims. The work consists of three volumes with a continuous pagination, covering in chronological order the following periods: Volume One: 1482–1890; Volume II: 1900–1950, and Volume III: 1954–1964. The work comprises almost 30 hajj accounts and other relevant texts from different periods of time and from persons with a different background.

In the excellent preface (chapter 1) the author explains that in this work he aims ‘to collect as many as possible personal hajj accounts by people from Nusantara from the past’ (p. 1). The period dealt with in this book, loosely designated as ‘The Past’ (Masa Silam), is primarily the period before Independence, while the last three chapters of Volume II (chapters 22–24) and five chapters in Volume III (chapters 25–29) date from after this event, chapter 29 containing the account of the film director Misbach Yusa Biran from 1964.1 Taken together, these chapters constitute almost half of the entire work (pp. 699–1218). Also the concept of hajj account is used in a loose sense, because in addition to hajj accounts proper, in which people write about their personal experience of the hajj, the work also includes other, non-personal, relevant documents (pp. 4–5). After having thus explained the criteria for including a particular text, the preface continues with an overview of the relevant historical and political backgrounds, as well as other information which is significant to understand the texts presented in the remainder of the work properly. This 144 page preface is

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1 After the 1970s, with the rise of the middle class, the personal hajj accounts become much more numerous, see Chambert-Loir 1996.
itself a small monograph and forms the best general introduction we have to the hajj from Indonesia until 1960.

After the lengthy preface, the remaining chapters of the book present the various texts, ranging from very short to very long. Each text is introduced in a thorough way, explaining precisely what the source of the text is and what part is actually presented, as well as introducing the author of the text concerned. It is virtually impossible to render the entire content of this huge work, but a number of chapters which I found especially good were the legendary accounts of the hajj by Sunan Gunung Jati (chapter 3) and Yusuf al-Makassari (chapter 4); a description of Mecca and Medina in the unpublished Acehnese version of the Hikayat Makah Madinah from 1873 (chapter 6); the account of the travel from Singapore to Jeddah by Abdulkadir Munshi in 1854 (chapter 12); parts of a pilgrimage manual from 1875 by Sayyid ‘Uthman (chapter 14); the story of the Regent of Bandung R.A.A. Wiranatakusuma from 1924, which has been included in full, and to which 55 pictures have been added (chapter 20, pp. 551–664); the accounts by Hamka, in 1927 and 1950, respectively (chapters 21 and 23); the report by Ali Hasjmi who was the first to travel by plane to the Holy Land in 1949 in the framework of a government mission (chapter 23); and the story by Rosihan Anwar who in 1957 was amazed to see that although Indonesian women at home did not wear the veil (purdah), many of them started wearing it as soon as they arrived in Mecca (chapter 26, p. 996). The final chapter 30 contains useful statistics on Indonesian pilgrims from 1850–2012, which show the explosive growth of the number of pilgrims from the 1990s onwards, mounting to the incredible number of 211,000 in 2012.

The major part of the book has been prepared by Henri Chambert-Loir, but in a number of cases other scholars have participated: chapter six on Aceh was written by Reza Idria; Suryadi contributed with three pieces: chapter 8 on the Malay version of the Syair Mekah dan Madinah by Daud Sunur from 1832; chapter 13 presenting the edition of a short manuscript from Leiden University Library from 1873 with the admonitions to perform the hajj from a Sundanese panghulu, entitled Buku Wulung Haji, and chapter 17, rendering three articles on the hajj from 1903–1905 found in the journal Bintang Hindia. Another chapter (18) focuses on two maps, which were printed in Mecca in 1911–12 to establish the precise direction of prayer when travelling from Indonesia to the Holy Land; this chapter was prepared by Chambert-Loir together with Syarief Hidayat.

The work is nicely printed and the three volumes are sold together in a beautiful carton box for the amazingly low price of IDR. 125,000. In the work numerous pictures and facsimiles of manuscripts are included in black and white, which greatly contribute to the value of the present work. The cover of
each volume shows a distinct, beautiful painting on glass featuring Mecca in full colour, and these paintings are so extraordinary that I think it would be worthwhile to devote a separate publication to them.

All in all, I conclude that this work is a fine anthology and presents a wide variety of interesting texts from different periods of time and from persons with a different background, which are relevant to better understand the hajj from Indonesia. In addition to re-editing often difficult accessible texts, the work also presents a lot of new and rare materials which had not been published earlier. Anyone interested in the hajj should obtain a copy of this wonderful source book.

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Reference