

# The Hajj and Europe in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Age

The Hajj, or the Muslim Pilgrimage to the Holy Places in Mecca and Medina, is not merely a religious undertaking of devotion for Muslims; it is a global annual event that included political, social, economic, and intellectual aspects throughout world history. The study of Hajj history in the pre-modern and modern eras unravel important mundane human ties and networks of mobility that go beyond its primary religious meanings for millions of Muslim believers around the globe. In other words, throughout history the Hajj traffic routes and itineraries regularly created new religious, political, social, and cultural contact zones between Muslim regions on the one hand, and with the geographical boundaries of other parts of the world on the other. Since medieval Islamic history, the Hajj had “accelerated sea trade as thousands of pilgrims and merchant-pilgrims made their way to Mecca and Medina by sea, stopping at coastal towns where they often traded goods.”<sup>1</sup>

European connections to the Hajj have a lengthy history of centuries before the influx of Muslim migration to the West after World War II. During the colonial age in particular, European and Ottoman empires brought the Hajj under surveillance primarily for political reasons, for economic interests in the control of steamships and for the fear of the growth of pan-Islamic networks. Another important motive for the European scrutiny of Hajj was their anxiety for the spread of epidemic diseases in their colonies after the pilgrims' return.

The present volume focuses on the political perceptions of the Hajj, its global religious appeal to Muslims, and the European struggle for influence and supremacy in the Muslim world in the age of pre-colonial and colonial empires. By the term “empire,” we follow in this volume Jonathan Hart's particular reference to “those western European nations who, beginning with Portugal, began in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to expand offshore and later overseas.”<sup>2</sup> In the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century there was

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1 Dionisius A. Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam From Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 65.

2 Jonathan Hart, *Comparing Empires: European Colonialism from Portuguese Expansion to the Spanish-American War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

a pivotal change in seafaring through which western Europeans played important roles in politics, trade, and culture.<sup>3</sup> Looking at this age of empires through the lens of the Hajj puts it into a different perspective by focusing on the question of how increasing European dominance of the globe in pre-colonial and colonial times had been entangled with Muslim religious action, mobility, and agency. The study of Europe's connections with the Hajj therefore tests the hypothesis of how the concept of agency is not limited to isolated parts of the globe. By adopting the "tools of empires,"<sup>4</sup> the Hajj, which by nature is a global activity, would become part of global and trans-cultural history.

With this background in mind, the volume is a collection of papers, most of which were read during the "Europe and Hajj in the Age of Empires: Muslim Pilgrimage prior to the Influx of Muslim Migration in the West" conference, held at the University of Leiden (13–14 May 2013) in collaboration with King Abdul-Aziz Foundation in Riyadh. A group of scholars were invited in order to investigate European connections with the Hajj on various levels. The read papers reflected on how much first-hand primary sources can tell us about European political and economic perceptions of the Hajj. How did the international character of the Hajj as a Muslim sacred ritual influence European policies in their struggle for supremacy over the Muslim world? How did Muslim subjects under European colonial rule experience the logistic, economic, religious, and spiritual aspects of the Hajj?

In early-modern and modern history, the Hajj became connected to the long European tradition of seafaring in the Western Indian Ocean firstly by the Portuguese in the 16th century, the Dutch during the 16th to 18th centuries, and the English presence during the 19th to late mid-20th century.<sup>5</sup> It is true that the Portuguese introduced a new kind of armed trading in the waters of the Indian Ocean. This period was "an age of contained conflict" in India and the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup> In the early modern period in particular, Muslim ships carrying pilgrims were threatened by the Portuguese. In 1502, for example, a

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3 Hart, *Comparing Empires*, 3.

4 Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); as quoted in James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (eds.), *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 3.

5 Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam*, 4. See also, Tamson Pietsch, "A British Sea: Making Sense of Global Space in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Global History* 5/3 (2010): 423–424. Eric Tagliacozzo, "Navigating Communities: Distance, Place, and Race in Maritime Southeast Asia," *Asian Ethnicity* 10/2 (2009): 114.

6 Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 19.