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Globalization and the Hajj Pilgrimage: From a Brief History to the Future Management of Mecca and Medina

Review by Solaiman M. Fazel

Hajj: Global Interactions through Pilgrimage

by Luitgard Mols & Marjo Buitelaar, eds

Sidestone Press, 2015

Mols and Buitelaar's edited volume places the Hajj within a wider historical scope that informs us of the ways that the political and cultural spheres of the Middle East have been restructured as a result of interactions with the global economic system since the second half of the nineteenth century. These social transformations have been instigated by the advent of modern technologies, new modes of transportation, and the rise of a middle class that has placed travels to Hajj (and Umra) within reach of increasing number of Muslim pilgrims from the so-called Muslim heartland and overseas. The volume shows the processes of change by tracing the flow of contemporary objects and ideas on networks of scholars, entrepreneurs, artists, and communities.

Hajj weaves together a rich and eclectic collection of material: (new) primary sources, curated collections, material culture, fieldwork data, and in-person interviews. It discusses the theory, rituals, and personal experiences of the Hajj from various social, class, and personal perspectives. The individual chapters make effective use of maps, graphs, scrolls, murals, and paintings to help the reader along. The twelve chapters are organized into two overlapping sections. The first section covers the broader "religious, social, and political meanings of the Hajj," (p. 1) and the second section reminds us that Mecca has always been a venue for the exchange of products. Contributors to the second section study Hajj-related objects and tell us about the implication of Hajj "pilgrimage in the daily lives of Muslims in the past and present" (p. 2).

Chapter one opens with a brief overview of the pilgrimage theories. Buitelaar includes the 1980s developments when the gaze of pilgrimage studies shifted from intrinsic quality toward shrines as sites of contestation among different social groups. Buitelaar argues for a methodological approach for an anthropology of Hajj that could transcend the “intrinsic” and “constructed” debate. In chapter two Werbner states how Pakistani Muslims in the United Kingdom interpret Hajj as a ritual of purification and connection between distant places. The sequence of Hajj rites that pilgrims perform connects them to a “powerful chain of placed memory,” and gives them a sacred “homing desire” (p. 49). In chapter three McLoughlin shows how Muslim identity is constituted through the enactment of normative religious scripts such as the Hajj among the British Muslims. In addition, he points out the lucrative Hajj industry sadly remains risky, “and fraud has become a problem” while the need to modernize services and facilities that can safely accommodate over three million pilgrims at once looms large (p. 46).

Bianchi’s chapter discusses that Hajj travel has become a politicized feature of daily life in Indonesia and Turkey. In both countries government “sponsorship of the Hajj generates a steady stream of scandals, subsidies, services, contracts, investments, and patronage” (p. 65). Requests for favoritism intensifies when Saudi officials suddenly change the national Hajj quotas, which are often politically driven. Bianchi argues for restructuring the Hajj management since Saudi officials remain out of touch with the more advanced cosmopolitan societies. Moreover, Saudi officials continue to “demolish historic sites in the Holy Cities, and systematically mistreat Shi’ite, female, and non-white pilgrims from every corner of the world” (p. 78). The final chapter of section one is by Leeuwen who revisits the theme of transnational “network of scholars,” the “place of religion in future societies,” and the “purification of the faith” that were part of Rida’s 1916 pilgrimage account (p. 91). The essential question of how to reform and by what method that would not result in more conflict in the heterogeneous Muslim societies are not discussed. Some of the ideas brought forward in Leeuwen’s chapter overlaps with Langner’s section in *A Global Middle East* (2015).

The second section of the volume covers nineteenth century arts and material cultures related to the Hajj and Medina. Porter in chapter six gives an overview of the symbolic meaning of the gifts that were sent by the elites and kept safe in the *Qubbat al-Sharab* structures in Mecca. This notion of gift giving is reminiscent of the social system of reciprocity in which the honor of giver and recipient are engaged, and forms the central thesis of Marcel Mauss in *The Gift* (2000).

In chapter seven, Moore explores the visual manifestations of Chinese relations to the Hajj, the books written in Chinese known as *Han Kitab*, and refers to Liu Zhi (1660-1739) who argued that Islam does not conflict with obedience to the Chinese imperial state. In the next chapter, Tütüncü studies a three dimensional oil painting of Mecca from approximately 1710-1712. He gives insights about the nature of urban Mecca and its cultural topography. Kruk and Oort surveys the decorative murals in parts of Egypt, which was usually added by relatives and friends of the pilgrims for their homecoming to highlight the major elements of the pilgrimage fulfillment. They argue against the notion that murals had an apotropaic function (p. 165). Similar to murals that were painted on the interior and exterior walls was the pilgrimage scrolls, another manifestation of the Hajj pilgrimage. Mols' chapter studies the textual and pictorial Hajj Certificates from the late-nineteenth century, and elaborates on the impact of pilgrimage on the local social relations.

Vrolijk approaches the study of Hajj-related objects from a different perspective. He studies and contextualizes a mid-fifteenth century map with Ka'ba at its center. He argues that a Mecca-centric world is an aberration in the tradition of Islamic cartography. The depiction of the Ka'ba in maps is a relatively late phenomenon, dating from the mid-15th century onwards (p. 216). The second object that he looks at is a group portrait taken at the Dutch consulate in Jeddah, which he argues is not an accurate depiction of daily life in late nineteenth century, but an artificial view with strong orientalist overtones (p. 225). In the final chapter, Neil van der Linden, offers a collection of twentieth and early twenty-first century songs from Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon that celebrate "the departure and the return of the pilgrims" and concludes that this genre of songs are not as diverse as it once was (p. 229). He argues that the nature of music celebrating pilgrimage has been impacted by the parallel rise of puritanical teachings and bourgeoisification.

The writing throughout this volume is rich, thoughtful, and engaging. Scholars of Pilgrimage Studies and students will find this timely publication useful since there is not a lot of prior anthropological studies on this range of topics. The bibliographies at end of the each chapter includes a list of old and new published works, which are useful for theorists and anthropologists of Hajj. It is also important for Hajj bureaucrats since the issue of (mis)management that led to the tragic loss of life of hundreds of pilgrims was amplified at the United Nations General Assembly 70th Session.

Lastly, this volume is a welcome addition to the anthropology of the Middle East and Islam. The

chapters force us to rethink the impulse toward homogenization, canonization, and legal consensus of scholars that is often given priority and appears to be inconsistent to historical Islam and to today's cosmopolitan realities. It remains to be seen if the problem of sectarian, class, and ethnic discrimination will intensify or vanish with the rise of religiously inclined bureaucrats. How, one wonders, will the present frustrations with Saudi control over Mecca impact the personal experience and the Hajj Industry in the near future. *Hajj* leaves us with the palpable question of whether the management of Islam's holy sanctuaries in Mecca and Medina should become under the auspices of Muslim majority countries.

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