

## The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca

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John Slight

In a time of ‘pressure to publish’, ‘publish or perish’, and ‘publish then perish’, it’s a great pleasure to read a work that has taken a decade to metamorphose from a small folder of notes on the Southeast Asian Hajj to this enormously rich and varied volume.

Eric Tagliacozzo sets out to present a history of the Hajj from Southeast Asia from the early modern period, when records on the phenomenon are first available, to the present day (p. 3). This has not been attempted before on this scale. Although the Southeast Asian Hajj is mentioned briefly in more general works on the pilgrimage, there are very few detailed existing treatments, and some of these are in hard-to-access places – unpublished theses, chapters in out-of-print edited volumes, and works from the colonial era (p. 11). More broadly, the work is a study of human beings’ internal and external lives, and is an attempt to help write a new history of the Middle East by decentring the narrative away from that geography (p. 9). He rightly sets out early on the importance of the Hajj in terms of its scale (pp. 4–5) and its impact as a ritual on Muslims across the world, which makes clear the importance of studying its history. In terms of the book’s aims, they are all resoundingly realised, and it performs a successful role in its contribution to the history of the Hajj, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, as well as its contribution in analysing the complexity of humanity’s experience that is bound up within these parameters. Taken together, these make a large contribution to even broader canvases – the history of Muslim societies across the world, the history of pilgrimage, and histories where we see the intersection and collision between trade, commerce, travel, ritual, devotion, politics,

empires, elites, ordinary men and women, states, and memories. *The Longest Journey* is worthy of a very wide readership.

The book is coherently organized, comprising three parts: one: 'Deep structure, *longue duree* – charting the Hajj over the centuries; two: 'Sailor, doctor, statesman, spy – the Hajj through four colonial windows'; three: 'Making the Hajj "Modern" – pilgrims, states and memory'. Within each part are four chapters. The relatively short chapters are an advantage in terms of the overall flow of the book, and will be useful to teachers who can set individual chapters as course reading – they can be read equally productively as stand-alone works or as part of the book. Organizing the book chronologically gives us an evocative sense of how the Hajj from Southeast Asia has changed over time, and enables us to easily compare early modern Hajj narratives with the modern-day oral histories Tagliacozzo analyses in the final chapter. Making sense of this vast topic would have been harder if a thematic approach had been followed.

Chapter one, 'Ancient pilgrims', re-assembles the history of the early Hajj from Southeast Asia from the early 17th century, situating it within the spatial context of the Indian Ocean and the growing number of people who crossed that ocean for religious and other purposes. Tagliacozzo's point here is to highlight the increasing importance of the linkages between Southeast Asia and the Middle East, in human and material terms. This chapter's strength is highlighted when one reaches the later part of the book – the dense interregional connections that the Hajj forged across the Indian Ocean were a product of centuries of activity that long preceded the European colonial moment.

Chapter two, 'Mecca's tidal pull', engages with Indian Ocean studies by focusing on the Red Sea and Western Arabia (what is now modern-day Yemen) through 'commodities in motion' and 'local histories of a translocal place' (p. 42). Tagliacozzo argues that trade and diplomacy formed important backgrounds to the Hajj, and that Southeast Asian pilgrims were one of many communities engaged in these processes. This chapter successfully builds on earlier works such as Michael Pearson's *The Pilgrimage to Mecca: the Indian experience 1500-1800* (1) that foreground the importance of trade and commerce as enabling factors for pilgrims' journeys, and shows how the Red Sea and Arabia were both sources for a variety of goods and nodes for their distribution. Commerce ran parallel to piety, as Tagliacozzo deftly illustrates.

Chapter three, 'Financing devotion', is a valuable study of the economics of the pre-modern Hajj. Despite the spiritual gravity of the ritual, the pilgrimage was possible 'not in people's hearts and minds, but rather through their bank accounts' (p. 63). Tagliacozzo charts the shift in financing the Hajj between the pre-colonial and colonial era, which saw a shift from small numbers of well-off pilgrims making the journey, to the rise of European colonial states and technological change through steamships – both were trends that enabled more pilgrims to go on the Hajj. He argues that financing the Hajj for pilgrims in this era was done 'largely through channels that colonial governments could check and approve' (p. 64). This chapter serves as vital economic underpinning for the rest of the book.

Chapter four, 'Sultanate and crescent', is particularly rewarding through its meticulous analysis of Malay-language texts that display knowledge of, and interpret, the Hajj from the 17th to early 19th centuries. It sheds further light on the 'mental worlds' of Malay courts and statecraft, and argues that the Hajj 'played a vital role in fusing religious and political power' in both the Malay and Indian Ocean worlds (p. 84). Analysing mentions of the Hajj in such texts and conceptions of sacred geography, Tagliacozzo shows how the pilgrimage grew in importance among Malays who both travelled across the Indian Ocean and those who stayed at home, and charts how Southeast Asia was brought into the religious and intellectual worlds of Arabia and its surrounding Muslim lands.

Chapter five, 'In Conrad's wake', will interest historians and literary scholars alike. Tagliacozzo provides a much-needed new analysis of *Lord Jim* and the 'inspiration' behind the story, the case of the ill-fated pilgrim ship *SS Jeddah* in 1880. His key argument is that *Lord Jim* should be read 'as a historical product of its time, alongside other period historical sources' (p. 109). Through his careful assessment of literary historians and theorists, the use of Conrad's letters and analysis of records relating to the *Jeddah* incident (in short – the ship got into difficulties and the European officers abandoned ship; the pilgrims rescued the ship; there was

a huge scandal over the Europeans' actions), Tagliacozzo's argument is successful. According to a literature scholar who read this chapter, Tagliacozzo has the opportunity to successfully moonlight as an English literature professor if he wants. One small point: he states that before the publication of *Lord Jim*, it is 'safe to say that average Westerner knew almost nothing' about the Hajj (p. 117). This doesn't take into account the popular success of Richard Burton's travelogue, published in 1855–6, which was arguably the literate Westerner's introduction to the subject (see Dane Kennedy's *Highly Civilized Man* (2)). I'm disregarding earlier seminal works such as Johann Lewis Burckhardt's 1829 account, because they were not nearly as commercially successful as Burton's account. The chapter's analysis widens out to consider Conrad's views on empire and the colonial vision of the Hajj, making valuable points on race and Islam (pp. 125–8). Here is a repeated strength in the book, the ability to move from the fine detail to make larger interventions in debates such as that over colonial perceptions of the colonized world.

Chapter six, 'A medical mountain', is again a fresh treatment of a topic popular among studies of the colonial-era Hajj, the issue of epidemic disease and sanitary control. Tagliacozzo engages deeply with the medical literature of the time, in multiple languages, to lend authority to his account. The fight against epidemic disease was a key arena where 'aggressive European powers sought to manage the Hajj on the grounds of global epidemiological survival' (p. 134). His analysis of the Dutch case is especially good, but I thought the discussion on pilgrims from British Malaya would have benefited from more space to develop his points further. Tagliacozzo is right to say that places like the quarantine station on Kameron Island in the Red Sea were 'emblematic of the possibilities of the modern age', but the stress here might fall instead on possibilities – while the sanitary and quarantine measures certainly had a great impact on pilgrims' travel experiences, this epidemiological battle was an uphill struggle throughout this period. Even with cholera 'defeated' in Arabia by the early 20th century, the pilgrimage remained an acute health hazard for many, shown by the astonishing death rates, especially among Malay pilgrims, that persisted well after the end of the Second World War.

Chapter seven, 'The skeptic's eye', tackles head-on perhaps the most important and controversial colonial figure related to the Hajj, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. Tagliacozzo's analysis of Hurgronje's private letters gives us a new view of a man who wrote his doctorate in Leiden on the Hajj, converted to Islam and lived in Mecca from 1884–5, then became Adviser to the Dutch East Indies government, and was deeply involved in the brutal suppression of Acehnese resistance to the Dutch during the bitter war of 1873–1914. The use of private letters and colonial state records side-by-side give us a far more nuanced view of what Tagliacozzo calls the Dutch 'high colonial state' than has been presented in previous works. While Hurgronje produced a huge amount of material on the Hajj for his colonial employer, an interesting trend that Tagliacozzo draws out is Hurgronje's sense of resignation that 'it was too large an event for any one man to fully master or control' (p. 171). We could extend this point to the Hajj and the other colonial states in this period, whether they were located in Southeast Asia, South Asia or Africa. Tagliacozzo successfully unpicks the nuances and ambiguities of Hurgronje's involvement with the pilgrimage.

Chapter eight, 'The Jeddah Consulates', meditates on the phenomenon of state surveillance through a case study of European espionage in the Hijaz during the colonial period. Tagliacozzo charts how the Red Sea was an arena for Great Power competition and politics, and the consulates were key players in this wider struggle. Given the scope of what I call Britain's Muslim Empire and its engagement with the Hajj (during the colonial period, most 'overseas' pilgrims came from British territories, closely followed in numbers by those from the Dutch East Indies) most studies have focused on the British case. Tagliacozzo offers a fresh angle of vision by considering the French, Dutch and Italians as well as perfidious Albion. The Dutch case-study is illuminating in examining information generated in the consulate in Jidda and at the local level across the Dutch East Indies, and how this information apparatus interacted with its constituent parts. Tagliacozzo clearly sets out the motivations and anxieties of Dutch colonial officials which drove this desire for knowledge, namely fear of being caught unawares by their subjects. The British case study gives a snapshot of the variety and scale of British intelligence related to the Hajj, itself a product of the vast scale of Britain's Muslim Empire and Britain's parallel role as a global power, of which the Hajj formed only one component. Tagliacozzo's description of the slightly awkwardly labelled 'British intelligence narrative' in

the Red Sea region sees this narrative beginning with the 1882 British occupation of Egypt. This is too late, and seems to be contradicted in the next sentence when Britain's occupation of Aden in 1839 is mentioned – a more appropriate starting date (p. 179). In terms of British intelligence-gathering on the Hajj, initial dispatches in the 1850s were patchy at best, but by the mid-1860s the British Consul in Jidda was compiling annual reports on the Hajj, although these were variable in quality. More broadly, while Tagliacozzo was right to make a focus of his prodigious archival research on what Bill Roff (3) had originally termed the twin poles of the imperial Hajj, 'sanitation and security', it would have been even better if he had subjected Roff's model to greater critique. For example, he might have examined the important role played by Muslim employees of the Dutch and British in the imperial administration of the Hajj (hinted at on p.182). Tagliacozzo places these colonial endeavours as part of a wider colonial paradigm of surveillance, criminalization and systems of control (p. 195), a fair point, but this was a paradigm which pilgrims were able to subvert, though perhaps with more success if they came from Africa and South Asia than the Southeast Asian examples here.

Chapter nine, 'Regulating the flood', is a smooth transition between the colonial and post-colonial worlds of the Southeast Asian Hajj. The post-colonial state management systems of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia are analysed. Tabung Haji, the Malaysian state organization, is an especially interesting case study (pp. 213–5). Official publications on the Hajj, such as 'how-to' guides, are surveyed, as is the increasing complexities of the state organizations that deal with the Hajj. Tagliacozzo gives a good sense of how, despite financial limitations, the post-colonial states of Indonesia and Malaysia were able to construct an extremely complex bureaucracy that has, by and large, facilitated the Hajj for many of their citizens.

Chapter ten, 'On the margins of Islam', sees the book change register as we follow Tagliacozzo on his sojourns around the region. Examining the Hajj from Muslim-minority countries is a valuable corollary to the previous chapter, and highlights the difficulties in going on Hajj from places such as Burma and Cambodia, and the different forms of Islam active in this 'arc'. Tagliacozzo makes the obvious point that the going on Hajj from these countries is different, but details these differences in an engaging and fascinating way, weaving together the history of medieval Islamic polities with stories of hushed interviews with Muslims in junta-ruled Burma.

Chapter eleven, 'I was the guest of Allah', provides an analysis of post-independence Hajj memoirs from Southeast Asia. This is an important analysis, considering how Hajj memoirs can be 'set out, discussed, and problematized' (p. 251). Tagliacozzo considers themes of place – Jidda, Mecca, Arafat, Mina, Medina, the issue of Hajj and the self in terms of place, and also pilgrims' introspection. This gives us the Southeast Asian Hajj memoir analysis that has been sorely lacking, which should take a central place alongside existing studies of Hajj narratives (a good anthology of historic and modern ones is Michael Wolfe, *One Thousand Roads to Mecca* (4)). The photos in this chapter (pp. 260–3) give a great sense of the variety of ways in which Hajj accounts are presented visually in the region.

Chapter twelve, 'Remembering devotion', is a powerfully evocative final chapter where the pilgrims' voices from Tagliacozzo's travels across the region take centre stage. This oral history is rightfully a vital part of this story. I won't spoil the stories, but some of them are quite haunting and unexpected (p. 284). Tagliacozzo weaves together discussions of the material and spiritual worlds in these interviews to present a compelling picture of the lived experience of Hajj in present-day Southeast Asia. One small criticism of part three as a whole is that nowhere in it does Tagliacozzo mention the Saudi-imposed pilgrim quota, which is the single most important regulatory innovation introduced in the post-colonial era. It would have been interesting to know what Tagliacozzo's interviewees (and authors of post-independence hajj memoirs) thought about this quota, given the fact that he explores many other facets of the modern-day Hajj with his interviewees that might make uncomfortable reading to those in official Saudi circles, concerned as they are with presenting their management of the Hajj in the best possible light. The book's conclusion skilfully draws together the work's threads and arguments and is a satisfying end to a *tour de force*.

The sources Tagliacozzo uses are one of the book's delights, for their incredible range – in form and geographical origin – and the way in which he has mastered all of them. Dutch East India Company (VOC)

records, European travellers' accounts of Arabia, the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, Javanese manuscripts, Arabic hajj narratives, Malay manuscripts and texts sourced from across Malaysia and Indonesia, Dutch colonial records, British colonial records, newspaper articles, literature such as *Lord Jim*, French and other European language medical records on cholera, epidemic disease and quarantine, the private letters of Joseph Conrad and Snouck Hurgronje, archives of the state pilgrimage organizations of Malaysia and Indonesia, Malaysian and Indonesian post-independence hajj accounts – books, pamphlets and magazine serializations, oral history recordings and the author's own oral history fieldwork across Southeast Asia (some 100 interviews). The archival listing (pp. 307–14) takes in some 25 archives and libraries across the USA, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This is a huge achievement and is really what make the book's analyses so strong – Tagliacozzo's points are undergirded by archival and manuscript material of great range and depth.

One of the foremost strengths of this book lies in the way in which Tagliacozzo is able to present the Herculean amount of archival research he's undertaken over these last ten years in an accessible way. Analyses and insights from archives such as the 22,000 fiches from the Dutch Consulate in Jidda, which must have taken months to trawl through, are presented briskly and with economy, and in elegant prose. Despite the variety of details in the book, you never feel bogged down by minutiae.

In terms of presentation, the book is well-produced, except for the size of the maps, which are far too small. For example, one tiny map details the author's extensive journeys interviewing pilgrims across Southeast Asia; a further map shows the provenance of various Malay texts related to the Hajj – these certainly merited a half or full page, as did many of the other informative maps. A feature of the book that is a bit of a departure from the standard monograph is the use of boxes with reproductions of judiciously selected primary sources (for example, pp.68–9, 91, 98-99, 164–5, 208, *passim*). These successfully add a further layer of depth to the work, and give us a real feel for the form and content of these documents, whether they are colonial reports or extracts from Malay texts. They are also a great bonus for teachers who have in this book a treasure-trove of primary sources on the Hajj that are reproduced within chapters that subject the sources to rigorous analysis.

This book is a triumph of scholarship, and a hugely important contribution to our understanding of the Hajj's history, and of the histories of the Middle East and Southeast Asia – regional markers that this work has shown are highly permeable and interconnected. *The Longest Journey* is essential reading for people who want to see how state-of-the-art world history is crafted and executed.

## Notes

1. Michael Pearson, *The Pilgrimage to Mecca: the Indian Experience 1500-1800* (Princeton, NJ, 1996). [Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). [Back to \(2\)](#)
3. William R. Roff, 'Sanitation and security: the imperial powers and the nineteenth century Hajj', *Arabian Studies*, 6, (1982), 143–60. [Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Michael Wolfe, *One Thousand Roads to Mecca: Ten Centuries of Travelers Writing about the Muslim Pilgrimage* (New York, NY, 1997). [Back to \(4\)](#)

The author is happy to accept this appraisal and is glad for the favorable review. He has no rebuttal to the reviewer's interpretation of his work.

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[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/66960>