

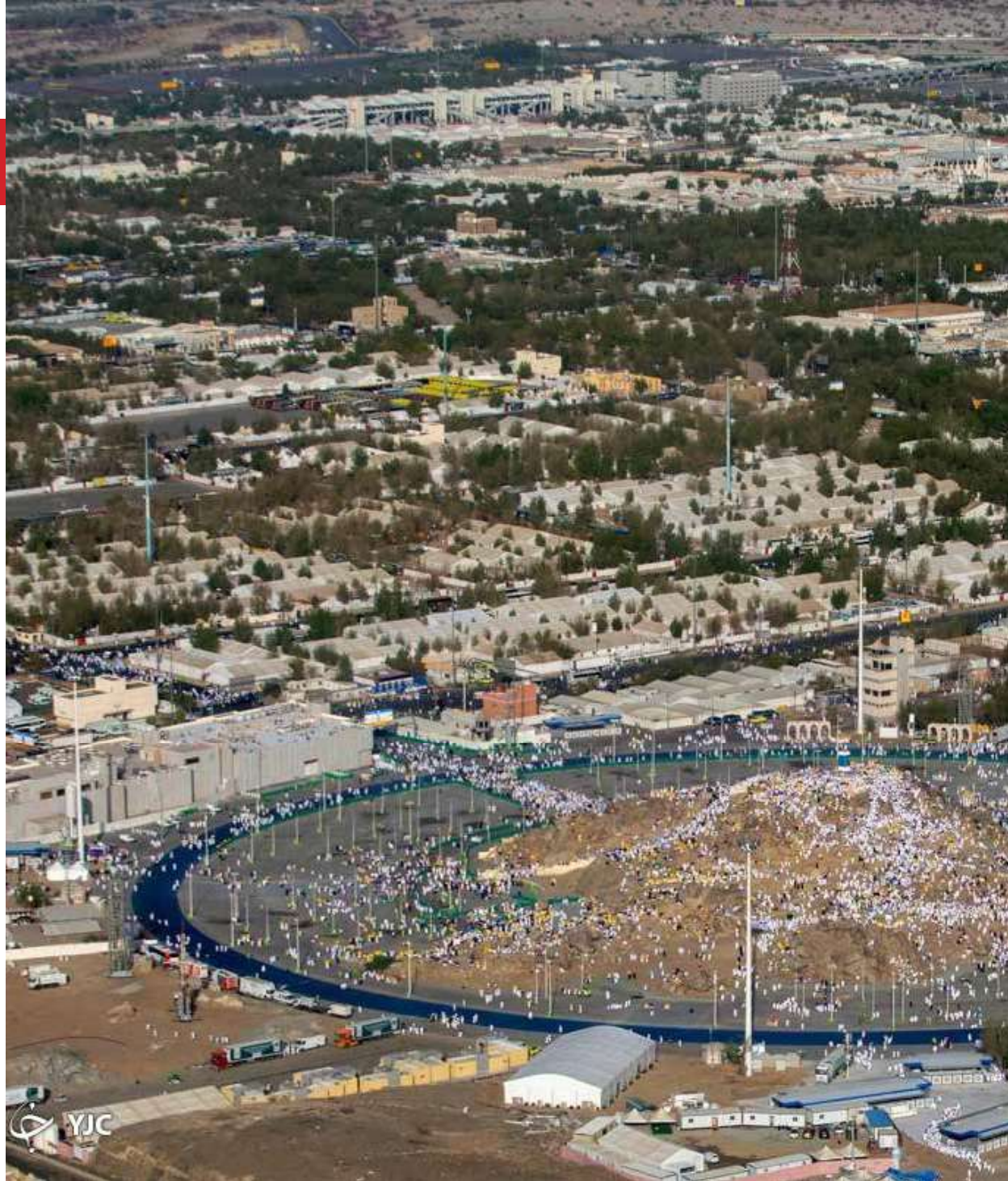


Hajj from the Viewpoint of Non-Muslim Elites

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The glory and grandeur of Hajj and the presence of millions of Muslims from all over the world in the land of Hijaz has attracted the attention of some Western scholars and thinkers who have published the result of their research and studies on this issue.

At times, some Non-Muslim European orientalists have been able to travel to the city of Mecca, despite the restrictions, participate in the Hajj ceremony, and wrote their observations in the form of travelogues in European languages. What follows is a selection of some of the statements made by these Western thinkers and orientalists reflected in their writings containing certain subtle points about Hajj.



Ludovico di Varthema

The first European who managed to visit Mecca in the Middle Ages and put down his observations in the form of a travelogue was an Italian by the name of “Ludovico di Varthema”. He established a strong friendship with one of the officers of the Mamluk Sultanate in Damascus and decided to travel together

with him to Meccas during the time of Hajj and eventually left for Arabia on the eighth day of Nisan (April) while wearing uniform Mamluk soldiers.

In his travelogue, Ludovico has expressed his surprise at the large number of pilgrims and the diversity of their nationalities and genders and written he had never seen such a large congregation in

any part of the world. In a chapter of his travelogue dedicated to the Hajj ceremony, Ludovico has recorded: “There is a very beautiful place of worship in the heart of the city of Mecca, which is a building similar to the Colosseum in Rome, with the difference that it is made of baked bricks, and not stones, and this temple (Masjid al-Haram) has a hundred gates.”



He then points to the existence of a building in the middle of Masjid al-Haram, without mentioning the name Ka'ba, and says that when people walk around this place they seek forgiveness from God, and this building - which he refers to as the tower - has a silver door that is located at a height equal to the height of a human being.

Sir Richard Francis Burton
Being an employee of the East India Company and having worked in different departments of this company, Burton took a long leave and by receiving financial support from the Royal Geographical Society of Britain he decided to travel to the Arabian Peninsula and Hejaz and eventually began his trip under the name "Mirza Abdullah" of Bushehr and

headed for Alexandria from England from where he traveled to the Arabian Peninsula. Being surprised by what he saw in Meccas he wrote:

I confess to this fact that none of all those people who clinched onto the curtains of the Ka'ba and cried or pressed their chests on "Hajar al-Aswad" (the black stone) is filled with intense emotions and overflowed with sensations like me - who was one of the pilgrims from Northern Europe. I began to think that everything that Arab poets have composed about this place is absolute truth and that the breeze that blows and moves the curtains of the Ka'ba is the breeze from the wings of angels and not the pleasant morning breeze. I must, however, admit this truth that the passionate emotions of the pilgrims arose from the depth of their faith, while my emotion was caused by the pride and joy of victory.

Dr. Ms. Charles Wadi

Dr. Charles Wadi, the author of the book "Muslim Thought" - who was associated with Oxford University - wrote in the Times magazine as follows:

"I come from a distant land with many sins. Anyone who lives in any corner of the Islamic world knows about the magnetism of Mecca. From the coast of the Nile and parts of Nigeria to Sarandib (Sri Lanka) people say farewell to their friends and relatives and go to Mecca. Presently, most people go to Mecca by plane, and dozens of planes land at Jeddah airport every day. At the time when Islam, like other religions, is being attacked

by non-religious people, the Hajj pilgrims, whose number is on the rise, wear simple two-piece clothing of cotton, which means negating all kinds of racial and class superiority and is indicative of getting prepared for the day of renewing one's covenant.

Venetia Porter

In her preface to the book "Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam", she writes: "If we want to know the contemporary world, we must know Islam well, and nothing can represent the values and dynamism of Islam better than Hajj. For those who are of secular point of view, pilgrimage is an obsolete thing and even for some Protestants, it is not reliable from the religious point of view. Thus, how can Hajj take us to the heart of Islam?"

When we see a large number of Muslims performing these mysterious rites - even though it may be strange from the point of view of some outside observers and, like the opponents of Islam, it may occur to us that Islam is not compatible with modernity - by having a glance at the history of man's spirituality we can realize that Hajj is very special.

Hajj is the only pilgrimage that, being one of the five principles of Islam, is obligatory for all Muslims. Hajj pilgrimage is the only act of worship that, if done with attention, enables a person to enter a different and eternal dimension. Pilgrimage frees us from the mere façade of our lives. By abandoning our ordinary lives and by circumambulating our physical bodies around the center of the world,

by symbolically returning to the beginning, by surrendering ourselves to the difficult rites of Hajj, and by living with kindness and gentleness in the community of pilgrims, we can learn that there are other possibilities in life. The enthusiasm involved in the rituals takes us beyond our usual mental preoccupations and provides us with a different mentality so that if we were aware and skilled pilgrims, we would feel anything else. Therefore, by studying Hajj, we not only get information about Islam, but we also discover certain spaces within our being that we have not discovered so far.

Robert R. Bianchi

Robert R. Bianchi is a political scientist and international lawyer who has lived and worked in China and the Islamic world for nearly two decades. He earned his Ph.D. and law degree at the University of Chicago, and he has also been teaching at some universities in the US, China, Qatar, and the American University of Cairo.

In the preface to his book "Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World" he notes, "I have written several books, but this book has captivated me the most and, in fact, it is like an unmatched love for me. This project went far beyond my initial imagination and effort because the managers of the Great Hajj Congress gave me more information than I expected, and in the countries I traveled to, I came in contact with many people. Shortly after I performed Hajj, I started my practical research in

Pakistan and Turkey, the outcome of which was so astonishing that I decided to visit other countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Senegal. I have never engaged in such a great project, and at the same time, every step led to the next step, and I was only following in the footsteps. The simplest answer to the question that why I got so involved in Hajj and why many people who did not even know me were prepared to stop their personal work to help me is that everything about Hajj is magical. From many aspects, Hajj depicts the heart and soul of Islam, Islam in its best, the most universal and humanitarian, and the most diverse and egalitarian form of it."

Hajj is the largest human congregation. Every year, more than two million people, simultaneously, go to Mecca to visit the House of God and perform their pilgrimage according to the rituals that have been carried out for fourteen centuries. Hajj is the spiritual peak of life and the most powerful manifestation of unity in this world and the hereafter.

Hajj is the time of sublime thinking and contemplation, during which pilgrims critically examine the purity of their souls as well as the political and social conditions of their land, the Islamic Ummah, and the world. The explicit alliance of religion and politics (in Islam) has made Hajj a pilgrimage and at the same time an annual congregation of Islam; a spiritual and expansive society through which the Muslim community ponders upon its own reconstruction and progress throughout history.