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# **Ottoman Arabia and the Holy Hijaz, 1516-1918**

**William Ochsenwald**

## **Abstract**

Governments in Arabia today usually ignore the Ottoman Empire's history in the region, but the Ottomans from 1516 to 1918 played a key role in coastal regions, especially in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. While Ottoman administrations intermittently ruled in Yemen and eastern Arabia, their influence was greatest in the holy Hijaz, the site of the worldwide pilgrimage. However, Ottoman rule was limited by Istanbul's distance from Arabia. Religion played a significant role in determining the nature of Ottoman control, helping to legitimize the state among its subjects. A detailed analysis of one province, the Hijaz, with a particular emphasis on the period from 1840 to 1908, shows the impact of general factors on political history. Hijazi environmental, social, and gender history were modestly influenced by the centralizing Ottoman government. The Ottoman Empire in Arabia succeeded in notably slowing the encroachment of European imperialism into the heart of Islam.

## **Introduction**

The Ottoman Empire ruled substantial sections of the Arabian Peninsula for about 400 years, beginning with gaining the allegiance of the Hijaz region of western Arabia in 1516 and lasting up to the end of Ottoman rule at the close of World War I in 1918. This means that the Ottomans influenced Arabian history throughout the early modern period of world history from around 1500 to around 1800, as well as during part of the modern period of world history, beginning around 1800. In order to understand the history of the Arabian Peninsula it is then essential to examine the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Arabia, especially in the key region of the Hijaz that contained the two holiest cities for Muslims—Mecca and Medina.

Yet despite the importance of Ottoman Arabia, the modern states of the peninsula generally ignore or even actively criticize Ottoman rule in the region. This is in part caused by the present ruling elites, who in most cases consist of members of dynasties that were historical enemies of the Ottomans. Others in Arabia today share the opinion of many Arab nationalists who view the Ottomans as anti-nationalist and who see the empire as an oppressor of the Arab people. Devout Muslims also recall with disapproval the religious syncretism that marked the early Ottoman state and the secularism that was gaining ground

in the Ottoman Empire in its last days (Hathaway, 2008; Masters, 2013; Ochsenswald, 1992; Ochsenswald, 2011-2012).

Outside the Arabian Peninsula, most Western scholars have also generally ignored the history of Ottoman Arabia, partially because of the difficulty of research access but also because as compared to such places as Egypt, Arabia before the era of oil production was deemed not worthy of attention. It was only the end of Ottoman Arabia during World War I and in particular the adventures of T. E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia," that captured much attention.

### Chronological Overview

In attempting to overcome these problems, an understanding of Ottoman-Arabian history should build on a brief chronological outline of Ottoman rule in the Arabian Peninsula (Salibi, 1980). Ottoman control over the Hijaz lasted through most of the period from 1516 to 1918, but Ottoman control over Yemen and the al-Hasa region of eastern Arabia was far more intermittent. In those two regions of Yemen and eastern Arabia, the Ottoman age can be divided into two periods of time: the first was from 1516 to the 1630s and the second was from about 1850 to the end of World War I in 1918.

Ottoman suzerainty came first to the Hijaz. After the Ottoman conquest of Mamluk-ruled Egypt in 1516, the local leader or sharif of Mecca (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad) voluntarily affiliated himself with the Ottoman Empire. From that time until the Arab Revolt of 1916, with only occasional brief intervals, the Ottomans had a military presence in Mecca, in its port city of Jidda, and in Medina. The Ottomans also attempted to provide security for transportation by land and by sea to the Hijaz.

In Yemen, to the south of the Hijaz, Ottoman rule was more tenuous, with two separate time periods of control. In 1538 the Ottoman admiral Süleyman Pasha formally expanded what had been up to then an informal presence and supervision to full Ottoman control over sections of Yemen, particularly the coast and the port city of Aden, but also parts of the northern highlands that were inhabited principally by Zaydi Shi'is. However, in about 1636 the Zaydis expelled the last Ottoman garrison, gaining independence from the Ottoman state for over 200 years. It was only in the 1840s that the Ottomans returned, taking control of the coast. In 1872 the Ottomans regained the interior of Yemen, and eventually the southern sections, though not including the British-ruled city of Aden or its hinterland. However, Ottoman power was severely shaken by a Zaydi rebellion before World War I (Ochsenswald, 1990). Several historians, including Thomas Kuehn, have lately argued that the Ottomans in nineteenth-century Yemen possessed a sense of cultural superiority over indigenous Yemenis similar to that of the European imperialists, thereby limiting the effectiveness of Ottoman rule in that distant province (Kuehn, 2011). In any event, of the 400 years between 1516 and 1918, Ottoman control in Yemen lasted about 185 years, slightly less than half of that time.

In the eastern part of Arabia bordering the Gulf, Ottoman expansion could take place only after the conquest of Iraq, a land which was contested with Safavid Shi'i Iran. The Ottoman ruler Süleyman the Great, known also as Kanuni Süleyman, won control of Baghdad in 1534; by 1550 most sections of the al-Hasa region in what is today Saudi Arabia gradually had come to accept Ottoman overlordship. This expansion was in a region where Portugal was expanding control, having seized coastal areas in Bahrain and in Oman

as part of a strategy aimed at dominating the commerce of the western Indian Ocean basin. Many in the population of the al-Hasa region welcomed the Muslim Ottomans, fearing Catholic Portuguese raiding and expansion. However, in about 1670 the Al Humayd chiefs of the Banu Khalid tribe overthrew the Ottoman governor and set up their own local principality. Subsequently, they and other separate and distinct local ruling dynasties in Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar eventually came to govern most of the coast. However, these independent states were challenged by the Saudi dynasty in alliance with Wahhabi Islam. The capital of the Saudi state was in the interior, first at Dir`iyya and then at nearby Riyadh.

The Saudis controlled the al-Hasa from 1795 to 1818, from 1830 to 1839, and from 1843 to 1871. However, in 1871, Midhat Pasha, the famous Ottoman reformer who was then the empire's governor of Baghdad, fearing the growing strength of Britain in the Gulf, sent 3,000 troops to invade and occupy al-Hasa. The region of al-Hasa thus came firmly under Ottoman control. In addition, the principality of Qatar eventually accepted a limited degree of Ottoman overlordship, much along the lines of Ottoman claimed suzerainty over Kuwait. This situation changed radically in 1913, the year before the outbreak of World War I, when Saudi forces occupied al-Hasa and expelled the Ottoman garrisons there. Britain had already severely challenged Ottoman claims in Qatar and Kuwait by extending a kind of protectorate over them. Thus, Ottoman control or strong influence in eastern Arabia lasted about 165 years out of the 400 year time period we are examining.

From this chronological discussion it is possible to ascertain that Ottoman influence in Arabia was more likely to have been influential in the Hijaz than in either Yemen or al-Hasa. Ottoman control lasted more than twice as long in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina than in Yemen or in the east.

### **The Importance of the Coast, Ottoman Distance from Arabia, and the Role of Religion**

Three major themes dominate the history of Ottoman Arabia from 1516 to 1918: the first theme is the key role played by coastal regions; the second theme is the limitation on the power and influence of the Ottoman state caused by its distance from the peninsula; and the third theme is the importance of religion in compelling involvement with Arabia. When considering the 400-year long relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Arabia it is important to recognize that the Ottomans were chiefly interested in the eastern and western coastal regions of the peninsula and in the transportation routes leading to them. To a much lesser degree the Ottoman government also occasionally had an interest in the southern coast, including such places as Aden. From the perspective of the 21st century when central Arabia, the home of the royal house of Al Sa'ud, dominates Saudi Arabia, the largest and most important country in the peninsula, Ottoman interest in the coastal periphery may seem odd. However, the Ottomans in this regard followed in the wake of earlier Muslim empires that had ruled portions of Arabia—such empires as those of the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Mamluks.

The reasons for imperial interest in the coasts were geographic, strategic, and religious in nature. Geographically, the Arabian Peninsula is about 1 million square miles (2.6 million square kilometers) in extent, but most of the interior was desert, with little agricultural production, scattered oases, a small population consisting mostly of nomadic

or semi-nomadic Bedouins, and few natural resources. A conquering empire would have to spend far more money and lives to gain and maintain control in such a region than could be taken as loot or as taxes. Before the discovery of oil and natural gas, central Arabia and most of eastern Arabia were poor—so poor in fact that neither the Ottomans nor preceding empires had been very interested in ruling them. (On the other hand, some regions of inner Yemen received enough rainfall to permit substantial agricultural production and to support a larger population.) However, the coasts of the peninsula had importance to the Ottomans for economic and strategic reasons: commerce with India through the Persian/Arabian Gulf and through the Red Sea with Africa and India was highly profitable, even after the Portuguese rounded southern Africa in the 1490s. Both the Red Sea and the Gulf waterways allowed the Ottoman navy to expand the empire's reach toward the vast commerce and rich agricultural lands of the enormous Indian Ocean basin. Conversely, both the Red Sea and the Gulf could be used by hostile powers to invade Ottoman territories, thereby threatening such regions as the valuable province of Egypt or the strategically important area of Iraq. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869 the Red Sea became an even more important locale for international commerce and military strategy as steamship technology dramatically increased the speed and size of commercial and military vessels.

The eastern Arabian coast of about 750 miles (1,200 kilometers) was a zone of commerce contested by the Ottomans, Iranians, Portuguese, the Dutch, and, particularly in the 19th century, the British. The western coast of about 1,200 miles (1,900 kilometers) and particularly the region of Hijaz were also of tremendous importance religiously, since the two holiest cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, were located there. The Ottoman sultans wished to maintain control of the western coast of Arabia so as to confirm their claim to be the protectors of Islam and the servants of the two holy cities. Supporting the hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina was a source of political and religious legitimacy. In the early centuries of Ottoman rule this claim could be reinforced by protecting and securing the pilgrimage ships coming to the Hijaz via the Red Sea, and the land caravans, coming slowly by camel every year from all directions of the Muslim world toward Mecca. In the 19th century the Ottomans had added responsibilities: to protect steamships from the numerous reefs of the Red Sea, to foster the pilgrimage by building a railroad to ease the burdens of camel travel, and to provide a greater degree of security against foreign depredations and influences that might impinge on the sacred territory of the Hijaz (Ochsenwald, 1980; Ochsenwald, 1984).

The second analytical theme is the limitations placed on the Ottoman state because of its considerable distance from Arabia. To understand this issue it is useful to review Ottoman history in general before turning to the Arabian Peninsula in particular. The center of the Ottoman Empire was in Anatolia from Ottoman beginnings around 1300, though at its height the Ottoman Empire ruled significant portions of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. This was thereby one of the largest empires in the history of the world. The ruling Ottoman dynasty was Sunni Muslim in religion and Ottoman Turkish in language. With its capital in Istanbul (the former Constantinople) after 1453, the central lands of the state consisted of the Balkans and Anatolia. They provided the largest numbers of troops and the greatest amount of tax revenue. The great artisanal production of the cities, the rich agriculture, and the thriving commerce of the Balkans and Anatolia were supplemented by the Arab provinces. Ottoman economic prosperity and cultural creativity were at a high point in the 16th century, but the 17th and 18th centuries saw this situation change

significantly. The power of the Ottoman sultans decreased while the grand viziers and great households of central and provincial officials became richer and more influential. As a result, local autonomy increased. It was during these two centuries that Ottoman power in Arabia was at its lowest ebb. In the 19th century, the Ottomans faced the growing military, economic, scientific, and industrial power of various Christian European states, in particular, Britain, France, and Russia. A series of political and military reforms succeeded in strengthening the power of the Ottoman central government, but the power of the imperialist Europeans increased even faster. By 1914 emerging internal nationalisms, foreign intervention, and disastrous wars had led to the Ottoman loss of almost all the Balkans, as well as all of Ottoman North Africa, including Libya. A misguided alliance with the German Empire during World War I sealed the fate of the Ottoman Empire, leading to its dissolution and the emergence in the 1920s of the Republic of Turkey as well as several Arab states, most of which were under the control of Britain or France (Finkel, 2005; Ochsenwald & Fisher, 2011).

How was it that the Ottoman Empire had lasted so long and had so often achieved greatness? While historians have advanced a variety of explanations, the flexibility of Ottoman provincial administration certainly played a role in the ability of the Empire to maintain a foothold in distant lands for hundreds of years. Whether in Rumania or Kurdistan or Algeria, the Ottomans often governed indirectly, only demanding some taxes, an acknowledgement of the dynasty's overarching supremacy, and control over external relations. In other regions, such as Bosnia, northern Syria, and Libya, the Ottomans on occasion extended their core institutions, eventually leading to a substantial degree of direct control. However, in the geographic core of the Empire, such as western Anatolia or Thrace, the Ottoman central government usually insisted upon a much greater degree of direct administration.

The political impact of the Ottoman Empire on Arabia was limited by the slow speed of transportation and communications. From Istanbul to Mecca is a distance of about 1,500 miles or 2,400 kilometers, while from Istanbul to Sanaa in Yemen is 2,000 miles or 3,200 kilometers. These distances precluded, or at least made very difficult, direct government.

There were also social, economic, and cultural consequences for the long-term influence of the Ottoman Empire on Arabia that ensued from this physical distance: for instance, very few Turkish-speaking Ottomans settled in Arabia. The few who did stay were soon assimilated into Arab society. Turkish poetry, Turkish tiles, Turkish miniature painting, and a host of other cultural accomplishments and techniques were not extended on a large-scale basis into Ottoman Arabia. Ottoman patterns of taxation and compulsory service in the military had to be greatly changed in Arabia or were not adopted there at all. An example is the conscription of adult Muslim males that became obligatory in the 19th century, a system that was not extended at all to Ottoman Arabia. Even when the Hijaz telegraph and the Hijaz Railway were built in the 1890s and 1900s, Ottoman rule in Arabia remained precarious and limited in scope.

In fact, one could argue that the great distance that separated the heartland of the Ottoman state from Arabia made Ottoman rule there a negative factor for the overall health of the Ottoman state. The gifts and subsidies of money and food to the people of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina drained the central treasury, while the provinces of Yemen and al-Hasa on the whole cost more than they produced in taxes.

Turning now to the third analytical factor, the religious claims to political legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty rested in large part after 1516 on Ottoman rule of Mecca and Medina, and Ottoman encouragement of the annual Muslim pilgrimage to those two cities. From its inception the Ottoman dynasty had been closely identified with Sunni Islam. The empire was a champion of jihad or holy war on behalf of the Islamic faith. In concrete terms the Ottomans dramatically expanded into Europe the Dar al-Islam, the realm where Islam was the predominant religion. The Ottomans fought against Safavid Shi'i Iran, while advancing Sunni Islam internally through the judiciary, taxation, decrees governing clothing, and a host of additional measures. By these means, the Ottomans achieved a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of their Sunni subjects that had not been readily conferred upon many earlier Muslim states. In later times, the Ottomans came to be seen as the sole guarantor of the independence of Islam from the expanding Christian European empires and the Christian missionary movements they encouraged. In the late 19th century the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II emphasized the claim that his ancestors had made to the caliphate. This use of the title caliph was part of a pan-Islamic policy whereby the sultan asserted that he was the rightful leader of all Muslims everywhere (Anscombe, 2014, pp. 113-115).

In Ottoman Arabia religious identity and motivations were often paramount. In the Hijaz especially, but also in Yemen and in the east, the Ottomans used religion as a means to justify their rule and to gain the acquiescence if not active support of the local populations. The Ottoman state portrayed itself as the defender of Sunni Islam against a host of enemies. In Yemen these enemies of the faith in the first period of Ottoman rule were the Portuguese and the Zaydi Shi'is. In Yemen in the second era the chief enemies were the British Christians, who had seized Aden for use as a naval base and coaling station in 1839; the Italian Christians, who were attempting to seize Ethiopia across the Red Sea; and, once again, the Zaydis. In Eastern Arabia, in the first period of Ottoman rule, the chief enemies of the faith were the Safavid Shi'is just across the Gulf in Iran, and the Portuguese. For the second period of rule in the East, the Wahhabi Saudis of the interior and the British Christians along the coast were the most active opponents of Ottoman-supported Sunnism (Anscombe, 1997). In the Ottoman Hijaz, the chief enemies over four centuries included a host of non-Muslims as well as the Wahhabis. In all three of these areas—Hijaz, Yemen, and eastern Arabia—local Shi'i Muslims were usually deeply unhappy with the oppression that they endured as a result of Ottoman policy that favored Sunnis.

The Ottomans attempted to support and expand Sunni institutions in Arabia, including the Hanafi legal school of religious jurisprudence; education through mosques and, in the late 19th century, also via a few state-run schools; and waqfs (awqaf or evkaf), Muslim religiously-sanctioned charitable endowments. However, the ability of the state to foster such institutions was limited, especially in the remote regions of Ottoman Arabia. It was chiefly in the Hijaz that the Ottomans succeeded in establishing major new waqfs, for instance, or in building or refurbishing major religious shrines.

### **Politics in the Ottoman Hijaz, 1840-1908**

A detailed analysis of one particular part of Ottoman Arabia for a more limited period of time will illustrate many of the general points made earlier; this will also permit a brief outline of the political, social, and gender history of one section of Ottoman Arabia. The

Ottoman Hijaz entered into a different era in 1840 with the restoration of Ottoman control after the withdrawal of Egyptian troops, while in 1908 the appointment by the Ottoman central government of Sharif Husayn ibn Ali as amir of Mecca marked an important turning point in its history, resulting ultimately in the Arab Revolt of 1916 against Ottoman rule.

Ottoman rule in the Hijaz between 1840 and 1908 waxed and waned, but there were three constants: Ottoman interest was centered on the coast and the two Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, not in the interior of the Hijaz; Ottoman influence in the Hijaz was limited by the distance separating Istanbul from Mecca, and the resulting slowness of transportation and communication; and religion was the chief motivating factor in Ottoman policy. Another constant was the tension between the sharifs who served as amirs of Mecca and the Ottoman valis or governors of the Hijaz. While both the sharif and the vali were appointed by the Ottoman sultan, the sharifs had an independent basis of legitimacy as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. (This same legitimacy extends today to the rulers of Jordan and Morocco.) Valis could depend on local Ottoman garrisons and could use most of the customs duties collected at the port of Jidda, but sharifs had more influence over the nomadic tribes, merchants, and religious officials than did the valis. However, both sharifs and valis enjoyed little power beyond the coastal regions, the chief cities, and the pilgrimage routes leading to Mecca and Medina.

Between 1840 and 1854 the Ottomans restored to the Hijaz the political regime that had existed before the Wahhabi and then the Egyptian occupations. Initially, finances were strengthened and the pilgrimage to Mecca took place in peace, with prosperity thereby ensuing for its merchants and guides. However, a Bedouin uprising around Medina helped bring about the replacement of the incumbent sharif by Abd al-Muttalib ibn Ghalib in 1851. Clashes between the new sharif and the vali exacerbated a widespread resistance to new anti-slavery decrees coming from Istanbul. Skirmishes, battles, and riots led to the replacement of Abd al-Muttalib by Amir Muhammad in 1855-1856. In 1858, 21 foreign Christian merchants and diplomats in Jidda were killed by an anti-foreigner and pro-slavery mob that was supported by a number of local notables. The British shelled Jidda, and ultimately the Ottoman authorities executed some of the ringleaders, including the market inspector of the town of Jidda. This incident demonstrated the futility of armed attack against Christian mercantile interests on the coast, while it also helped increase the power of the Ottoman state in the Hijaz.

After the upheavals of 1856 and 1858, the Hijaz from 1859 to 1882 enjoyed a period of relative peace and tranquility. One cause of this was that the numerous political and civil reforms in Istanbul called the Tanzimat were not, for the most part, applied in the Hijaz. Security was also maintained by Hijaz-based Ottoman troops even though they usually only numbered around 6,000 during these years. They were supplemented by police based in the cities, as well as the troops controlled by the Sharif of Mecca. The troops and police, as well as the whole settled population, were the beneficiaries of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The Canal considerably increased the speed of transportation and communication between Istanbul, Egypt, and the Hijaz, fostering more rapid movement of troops and commerce. As the central government went bankrupt in the mid-1870s, the power of the vali decreased, and the power of the Sharif grew. Almost as bad, from the point of view of the central authorities, was the failure of centralizing reforms in provincial administration that were imposed in places like Syria, but failed in the Hijaz. Istanbul annually provided subsidies to the Hijaz administration; this was in addition to gifts and



pensions to the people of the two holy cities. Special projects, such as the renovation of the water supply to Mecca in the 1880s, cost extra money.

The years between 1883 and 1908 saw substantially increased political turmoil in the Ottoman Hijaz. Epidemic diseases threatened the pilgrimage, while Sultan Abdülhamid II sought to gain more direct control over the region. Vali Osman Pasha assumed more and more power at the expense of the sharifs; for instance, in 1884, he became the head of the Meccan Haram, thereby assuming day-to-day control of the administration of the Kaba. Nevertheless, the Amir Awn al-Rafiq skillfully used palace intrigue in Istanbul and secured the removal of Vali Osman Pasha in 1886. In the late 1880s and early 1890s Awn al-Rafiq accumulated large sums of cash from the pilgrims and the merchants, but the return of cholera compelled him to support disinfection methods that were extremely unpopular. Awn al-Rafiq worked out a means of cooperating with valis until his death in 1905. This arrangement was disturbed when the central government built first a Hijaz telegraph line in the 1890s, and then announced the plan to construct a railway linking Ottoman Syria and Palestine to the Hijaz. In the 1900s the Sharif encouraged nomads to the north of Medina to challenge the construction of the Hijaz Railway from Damascus south to Medina. Local resistance was eventually overcome, and the Hijaz Railway reached Medina in 1908. This railroad line was termed by the Ottoman sultan holy because the supposed chief purpose in its operations was to foster the pilgrimage, but in addition to that laudable aim, the Hijaz Railway could be used to move troops as well as pilgrims south toward the Hijaz. A planned extension of the line from Medina to Mecca was stopped by the new Amir Husayn and by the multiple challenges the Ottoman government faced between 1908 and 1914 (Ochsenwald, 1984).

### **Environmental, Economic, Social, and Gender History in the Hijaz**

The environment of the Hijaz was harsh and forbidding: a bleak desert, bleaker mountains, and resulting widespread poverty outside the cities. Both the interior and the coast experienced scorching heat and there was little rainfall. For instance, in Jidda on average there were only nine days of rain annually. Inland, commerce and the movement of pilgrims were made difficult by the terrain and aridity. The city of Medina was particularly isolated from the rest of the Hijaz because of its geographic environment, while the port of Jidda was much more open to foreign merchants and contacts.

The demographic history of the Hijaz is difficult to ascertain because no official census was ever conducted there by the Ottoman government. A rough estimate of the urban population would indicate Jidda at between 20,000 and 30,000 persons; Mecca between 40,000 and 80,000; and Medina at 18,000 to 40,000. Including smaller towns, the urban population numbered around 85,000 in the period 1840-1870, and around 160,000 by 1908. There were also roughly 50,000 villagers. It is difficult to estimate the number of nomads who lived in the Hijaz, but there were perhaps about 400,000. This means that by 1900 there were somewhere between 400,000 and 800,000 people living in the Hijaz, an area of roughly 450,000 square kilometers. In addition, there were thousands of foreign pilgrims who flocked to the Hijaz at certain seasons of the lunar religious year.

If one can speak of an environment of time, that is, the way people calculated time and arranged the seasons of their activities, it is important to note the extraordinary significance of the Muslim religious calendar based on a lunar cycle. When the pilgrimage season drew

close, all Hijazis oriented themselves toward the pilgrimage as the single most crucial event of the year.

The economy of the Hijaz differed from that in most parts of the Middle East, since the bulk of the settled population lived by occupations other than farming. In the towns, there was a wide variety of different jobs, often controlled by guilds, with the most important being pilgrim guides and pilgrim brokers. There were few artisans while an absence of natural resources such as coal impeded industry. Market inspectors (*muhtasibs*) helped set standards and checked on fraud. Poverty was widespread, with outright destitution prevalent among pilgrims who could not afford to return to their home countries. On the other hand, there were few barriers to social mobility.

The nature of urban life might be seen in a brief description of Mecca. The city had no walls around it; it was traversed by unpaved, irregular streets lined with multi-floored dwellings. There was no fire department, streets were unlit at night, and much of the land was owned by *waqfs*. The center of town was the Haram featuring the Kaba. Mecca also boasted two hospitals, two military barracks, 40 water fountains, about 6,500 houses, 95 coffeehouses, and over 3,000 shops. Neighborhoods were divided along ethnic and economic lines.

Social organizations and status rankings in the cities included guilds, neighborhoods, and relationships between slaves and their owners. Many townspeople belonged to guilds—these were producers' groups organized according to skill or craft. Guilds controlled admission to trades, supervised the type and quality of goods produced, and regulated competition. Most guilds provided services to the pilgrims or made goods to sell to pilgrims. Some examples of guilds were the boatmen in Jidda, *muezzins*, camel-hirers, jewelers, bakers, barbers, butchers, masons, porters, and hawkers of goods. The leaders of each guild approved major sales, supervised prices, and arbitrated arguments and disputes. Neighborhoods were named after the chief landmark of the area, but neighborhoods were not fixed in size or boundary, so they could change. Mecca had about 20 such neighborhoods—in some cases they were based on occupation, so that, for instance, the potters lived in one neighborhood. Settled Bedouins lived in a separate neighborhood. Residents originally from Iran lived in still another neighborhood. There was some differentiation by wealth and status; those regions closest to the Haram in central Mecca were considered the most desirable neighborhoods. Poor people lived in areas where disliked occupations also clustered, so that, for instance, undertakers lived in one neighborhood. People identified themselves with their neighborhood, while male youths from different neighborhoods were rivals and sometimes even fought each other. An extreme example of this took place in 1881 when two neighborhoods fought for three days, resulting in 15 dead and 50 wounded. Slaves were ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy prevalent in the cities of the Hijaz. Many slaves were purchased by pilgrims as investments. Those slaves who remained in the Hijaz usually worked in homes, though some slaves were used for manual, artisanal, and agricultural labor. While the slave trade gradually decreased thanks to pressure from the British and some slaves were manumitted throughout this period, slavery itself remained an important institution in the Hijaz for townspeople, villagers, and nomads. During Ottoman rule, slavery was sanctioned and approved by the Muslim *ulema* as being in accordance with Islam.

The status of many social groups was related to religious criteria. The sharifs of Mecca and their households tended to be at the top of status ranking because of their prestige as

descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Descendants of other prominent families also enjoyed high esteem, including charitable gifts from the Ottoman sultan. On the other hand, Shi'is and in particular the numerous permanent Shi'i residents of Medina were often considered by Sunni Muslims to be inferiors. Resident foreign Sunnis generally formed separate social groups according to their places of origin. Chief among these in Mecca were the Indians, Javanese, South Arabians, and Turks. Social status was also linked to the extended family, which was by far the most important group in Hijazi society. Claimed patrilineal descent was the defining element in determining membership in a tribe.

Unfortunately, the history of women in the Ottoman Hijaz has not yet been sufficiently researched to allow many conclusive statements. Still, some tentative insights are possible. For instance, it is clear that the family was the crucial element in urban, village, and Bedouin social life. This meant that most women married while they were young; there were very few women who never married in their lives. A widow either remarried fairly soon after the death of her husband or moved back in with her birth family. Resident foreign males would frequently return to their home countries to find brides who would then come to the Hijaz to live.

Societal values were highly patriarchal. Probably women were more restricted in their freedom of movement than men, had little role in public political questions, and were legally subservient to husbands. However, there seem to be a number of exceptions to such broad generalizations. One example was Nafisa bint Abd Allah Khalifa, the spirited wife of Ibrahim Awliya, who refused to join her husband in Bombay, where he was then living, and instead sued him for support payments in a Medina judge's court in 1883. Still, there was a general separation of women and men outside the home, and women in the presence of males outside the immediate family circle usually wore veils and concealing robes. In towns middle- and upper-class women were secluded in their homes, though poorer urban women, most village women, and many Bedouin women mixed with men more freely and were less conservative in their clothing. Both men and women placed a great value on privacy, as could be seen in the design of urban homes. Marriage contracts and the shari'a, the holy law of Islam, accorded women numerous rights and guarantees, but the shari'a as enforced in the Hijazi court system seems to have given men more rights and a larger role in making family decisions. Among the nomads and probably among the villagers customary law often replaced the shari'a. Unfortunately, the shari'a court records for the Hijaz have not been examined for information on the status and actions of women. In other Ottoman provinces a wealth of data has been found in recent years in court records to illuminate the history of Ottoman women; hopefully, such data for the Hijaz exists and will be utilized in the future.

Moving from legal to illegal, or from behavior deemed proper to behavior deemed improper, there is also only limited information available. Sexual behavior may have differed considerably from the rather theoretical injunctions of the Ottoman judge or the amir of Mecca. Pilgrims were not supposed to have sexual relations during the crucial days of their pilgrimage, but before and after that time sex was permitted. Most pilgrims were males who traveled to the Hijaz without their wives. Behavior deemed scandalous was especially prevalent in the port city of Jidda. We know that in Jidda in the 1850s alcohol (forbidden to Muslims by shari'a) was openly available; Jidda in 1884 contained brothels. But most of the gender history of the 19th century Ottoman Hijaz, including non-normative behavior, is yet to be written.

## Conclusion

General conclusions include firstly that the Ottomans were chiefly interested in the coastal regions of Arabia and not the desert interior, except insofar as it encompassed trade or travel routes to the coasts. However, changes in transportation and communications started to alter this pattern that the Ottomans had shared with earlier empires. For instance, by the late 19th century, steamships had reduced the travel time from Suez to Jidda from as much as 30 days to only three days. The Hijaz Railway linked parts of the northern Hijaz closely to Syria in the 1900s. By 1914 the Ottomans were planning a railway extension from Medina to Mecca, and a separate railway in mountainous Yemen.

Later in the 20th century, automobiles, airplanes, and eventually cell phones not only revolutionized travel and communications in what became Saudi Arabia, they became ubiquitous. Saudi Arabia is dominated by the Al Sa`ud dynasty based in Riyadh, in the interior of the peninsula. The values of Wahhabism, long nurtured in central Arabia, are enforced throughout the kingdom, though they are often in conflict with the more open and tolerant customs and the diverse populations found along the coasts. So, in this regard, the nature of the Ottoman approach to Arabia for its 400-year interaction has been reversed. Secondly, Ottoman Arabia was poor. Even the agricultural production of Yemen was relatively modest, while al-Hasa in the east, despite its oases, was notably poor. The pilgrimage to the holy Hijaz gave its cities some wealth, but the outbreak of cholera or political upheavals among the sharifs could make even that income precarious.

In the 2010s, Yemen is still relatively poor, exporting workers abroad, especially to Saudi Arabia, and suffering from several civil insurrections and foreign interventions. However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including both the Eastern Province and the Hijaz, is extraordinarily rich as a result of oil and natural gas production. While much of the oil revenues wind up in the hands and pockets of a small elite, a great deal also trickles down to most Saudi subjects, though not much accrues to foreign workers. Ottoman Arabia had been subsidized by the central government of the Ottoman state and by Egypt. In the 21st century the users of oil and natural gas in the energy-importing regions of the world, such as Europe and China, provide Arabia with great wealth.

Thirdly, the impact of Ottoman rule on Arabia was fairly limited in most respects. This was due in part to the intermittent duration of the Ottoman presence in Yemen and eastern Arabia. Another important factor that limited Ottoman influence was the failure to extend and maintain Ottoman institutions throughout the regions in Arabia the empire nominally controlled. Ottoman administration was often heavy-handed and occasionally even brutal, but it was also usually quite limited in scope. Most people living in Ottoman Arabia were not much affected by Ottoman rule, whether considering social institutions, agriculture, commerce, language, law, or even religion. In this sense it is useful to compare Ottoman Arabia to other outer provinces of the Empire, such as Libya or Basra.

Fourthly, Ottoman rule over coastal Arabia was crucial in preserving existing societies from foreign attacks that might well have dramatically changed many aspects of life. For instance, in the 16th century the Ottomans protected the Hijaz from Christian Portuguese expansionism and al-Hasa from Shi`i Persian rule. In the 20th century and subsequently, first Britain and more recently the United States have played a similar role in protecting the existing status quo in Saudi Arabia from foreign invasion and revolution, whether

sponsored by Nasser's Egypt, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, or Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran. However, the religious and cultural differences between Britain and the United States as compared to the populations of the Arabian Peninsula today are in contrast to the religious and cultural similarities that existed earlier between the Ottomans and many of the inhabitants of Arabia.

Lastly, in the pre-nationalistic era of Ottoman rule in Arabia protecting the pilgrimage to Mecca and the symbolic prestige of ruling the two holy cities in the Hijaz ensured Ottoman interest in the Hijaz, though military, commercial, and imperialistic factors also influenced Ottoman policy. Ruling the Hijaz was a political benefit to the Ottoman royal family because it gave them religious status among their Muslim subjects and even among the Muslim population living outside the borders of the Empire.

A similar benefit redounds in the 2010s to the royal family of Saudi Arabia. One distinct difference though is that the Ottomans ruled the Hijaz in conjunction with the sharifs of Mecca, while Saudis expelled the ruling Sharifs of Mecca in the 1920s and have administered the Hijaz directly ever since. Ottoman rule in the Hijaz had been tenuous in part because of the dual nature of authority and administration; Saudi rule in the Hijaz has been much more secure, at least as long as the extraordinary wealth of the Kingdom endures. Today, it is the Eastern Province, with its population of Shi'is and physical closeness to Iran, that presents a graver regional challenge to Saudi rule and hegemony.

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