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EMPIRE AND THE HAJJ: PILGRIMS, PLAGUES,  
AND PAN-ISLAM UNDER BRITISH  
SURVEILLANCE, 1865–1908

During the late 19th century, British supremacy in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean basin increasingly brought the hajj under the surveillance and regulation of non-Muslim powers. With the development of steamship travel and the opening of the Suez Canal came rapid growth in the number of oceangoing pilgrims. Colonial authorities eventually identified the steamship-era hajj as both a conduit for the spread of epidemic diseases, such as cholera and plague, and a critical outlet for the growth of Pan-Islamic networks being forged among Indian dissidents, pilgrims, and the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the British and Ottoman empires engaged in a contestation of sacred space in which the stakes ranged from suzerainty over the Hijaz and the administration of the hajj to even larger questions of hegemony in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and even *dār al-Islām* as a whole.