
This is the English translation of an important book. It is the first work (published originally in Dutch, from which Wolfgang Behn translated it) of the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936). In it he describes how the pilgrimage came to be incorporated in Islam, with a great number of details about ceremonies, places and people. The pilgrimage was not a novel subject, but in Snouck Hurgronje's treatment it is. His ideas (some more than others) have now found their way into the Orientalist canon. The publication in English of this critical work on the pilgrimage is the perfect occasion to pursue the history of some of the concepts that its author first propounded.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, 24 November 1880, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje defended his doctoral thesis, Het Mekkaansche Feest ('The Mecca Festival'), before the Leiden literary faculty. His supervisor was Prof. Michael Jan de Goeje, the grandmaster of Arabic philology, whose editions are still reprinted today. Snouck Hurgronje's thesis was republished in its Dutch version in 1923, and now, 133 years after its defence.
thereafter, the pilgrimage found a steady place in Muslim thought, surrounding the Prophet's ascent to heaven. The symbolic act of returning to Mecca, the Prophet's birthplace, with the purpose of offering a sacrifice and visiting the Ka'bah, was seen as a re-enactment of the Prophet's ascension to heaven. These elements were incorporated into the pilgrimage ritual, transforming it into a pilgrimage to heaven.

The pilgrimage to Mecca, therefore, was not just a religious act but also a political one, symbolizing the unity of the Muslim community. It was a way to demonstrate the authority and legitimacy of the Caliphate, and it was also a way to strengthen the bonds between the Muslim communities.

The pilgrimage to Mecca was also a way for the Muslims to commemorate the Prophet's ascension to heaven. The Prophet's ascension to heaven was seen as a sign of the divine authority of the Caliphate, and the pilgrimage to Mecca was a way to reinforce this belief. The pilgrimage to Mecca was also a way to demonstrate the Muslims' commitment to the Prophet's teachings and the Islamic faith.
the newly kept lawns as today’s theologians would like to say, it was largely a matter of a group of scholars, who for a long time had been interested in the idea that Muhammad had been inspired by a Palestinian Jew, a theory which was by no means new, but which had not been seriously entertained before. The first to write about it was Snouck Hurgronje, who in 1880 published a book on the subject, entitled “The Pilgrimage of Abraham and Its Relationship to Islam”. In this work, he argued that the story of the building of the Kaaba by Abraham, as it appears in the Quran, is based on the story of the building of the temple by the Jewish prophet Ibrāhīm, and that this story was known to the early Muslims, who used it as proof of the divine origin of Muhammad’s mission. However, the book met with little interest, and it was only after Snouck Hurgronje’s death that his work was rediscovered and translated into English by Wolfgang Behn. Behn’s translation, published in 1914, has had a long life, with unpleasant consequences for one of its authors, namely Snouck Hurgronje himself.

In 1933, the Royal Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, in which Snouck Hurgronje was a member, decided to expel him from the academy because he was a non-Muslim. This decision led to a long and bitter dispute between Snouck Hurgronje and the academy, which was only settled in 1950, when Snouck Hurgronje was finally re-elected as a member of the academy. The dispute had a profound influence on the development of critical historical thinking about Islam, and it is often cited as a turning point in the history of Dutch orientalism.

The protest against Snouck Hurgronje’s expulsion was led by O.E. Jansen, who was one of Snouck Hurgronje’s closest friends and colleagues. Jansen was a leading figure in the study of Islam in the Netherlands, and he was determined to defend Snouck Hurgronje’s right to membership in the academy. He wrote a series of articles in the Academische Weekblad, which was the main organ of the academy, in which he defended Snouck Hurgronje’s academic freedom.

However, the protests of Jansen and his colleagues were not enough to save Snouck Hurgronje’s membership in the academy. The decision was finally confirmed by the academy’s council, and Snouck Hurgronje was expelled. The decision was met with widespread criticism, and it contributed to the development of a more liberal attitude towards Islam in the Netherlands. Snouck Hurgronje’s book on the pilgrimage of Abraham was reprinted in 1950, and it became a standard work in the study of Islam.

In the years following Snouck Hurgronje’s expulsion, Dutch orientalism continued to develop in a more critical and nuanced way. The study of Islam became more focused on historical sources, and less on theological speculation. The development of critical historical thinking about Islam was a direct result of the protests against Snouck Hurgronje’s expulsion, and it has had a profound influence on the study of Islam in the Netherlands.