

Prof. Ehrenfest heeft gevraagd,  
of Einstein  
met je mee mag gaan  
1.44 zal hij aan den  
trein <sup>zijn</sup> ~~zijn~~ en ook  
E. J. H. VERBODT  
LEIDEN  
3<sup>de</sup> kl. ~~keizer~~

Thierry

107 10

'Professor Ehrenfest has asked if Einstein may join you. He will be at the train at 1.44, also travelling third class. Thierry'. Note scribbled on the envelope of a letter to C. Snouck Hurgronje, 11 May 1923.

Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936)  
Orientalist

Catalogue of an exhibition on the sesquicentenary  
of his birth, 8 February 2007

Compiled by Arnoud Vrolijk and Hans van de Velde  
with an introductory essay by Jan Just Witkam



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LEIDEN 2007

van nieuwsgierigheid en in stilte hopen de dat het Allah mocht behagen, geene ingrijpende veranderingen te maken in gebruiken, die hun om meer dan ééne reden dierbaar waren. Weinig viel het toen te berouwen, dat eenmaal nit alle oorden der wereld moslams zich zouden opnaken om hunne heiligste behoeften te vervullen op die plaatsen, die eertijds eenigen woestijnstammen als marktplekken hadden gediend; dat enkele ~~Europaeen~~ <sup>1 M</sup> Europeenen levensgevaar zouden trotseeren om van dat hun verboden schouwspel getuigen te zijn. Voor Mohammed was het reeds de hoogste voldoening aan het hoofd van vele stammen van Arabië de feesten zijner vaderstam te besturen. Hoe hij dit deed en welk karakter de ludj van het jaar 10 der ~~Anahi~~ <sup>2 Y</sup> gaf aan den Mekkaanschen eredienst, zullen wij in de volgende hoofdstukken onderzoeken. <sup>3 H</sup> <sup>4 Y</sup>

*overgenomen uit de*  
 1/ *Daar de bevoegdheid van, ongeveer naar het deelen van aan de*  
*land te ontzigen, niet hun den toegang tot het heilige ge-*  
*sied te ontzigen, slykt uit tal van historische waarnemingen*  
*betreffende de kerke tusschen de 760jeren, by*  
*Baladuri, ed. De Goeje, p. 54 (de chelief Abd al malik*  
*laat een Christen timmerman en slyken in Mekka bouwen)*  
*Azragi, ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 299 (de chelief al malik laat*  
*in de meefid bouwen door een Perst-timmerman), p.*  
*396 (hetzelfde bericht als Baladuri), p. 501 (eene*  
*Christen begraafplaats "in het gebied van Mekka) enz.*

[6] Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's doctoral dissertation, *Het Mekkaansche feest*. Leiden, 1880. The author's own copy with corrections and annotations. See also p. 39.

## Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: a tour d'horizon of his life and work

By Jan Just Witkam

During his long and productive life, the Dutch arabist and islamologist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (Oosterhout, 8 February 1857 – Leiden, 26 June 1936) left behind a long trail of documents and publications: learned studies, political advices, literary essays, newspaper articles, letters, diaries, travel accounts, both published and unpublished. Much has been preserved and is now for the greater part kept in the collections of the Leiden University Library. However, when reading his letters and other unpublished documents one realises immediately that much of what was once available is now lost. Although the general line of Snouck Hurgronje's life can be reconstructed fairly well, some of its details may cause considerable difficulties to the historian. Anyone who reads his many-sided work cannot be but impressed by the inescapable logic of his argument and the often sharp and always very personal tone that characterises his texts. This is how he must have been in his social life as well, and many of his contemporaries were impressed by him to the extent that already halfway his life Snouck Hurgronje had become a legendary figure. He would remain so until long after his death, practically till today.

The choice of Mecca as a subject for his Ph.D. dissertation seems to have come from his teacher, M.J. de Goeje (1836-1909), who may have intended Snouck Hurgronje to produce a fine edition with learned commentary of Arabic texts on the history of Mecca. At Leiden, De Goeje ran what could almost be regarded as a 'production plant' for text editions, and he and his pupils were constantly busy preparing manuscripts for publication, usually in co-operation with the publishing firm of Brill in Leiden. However, Snouck Hurgronje must

soon have realised that this line of work was not what he wanted for himself in the long run. His thesis, *Het Mekkaansche feest*, 'the Meccan feast,' which he defended on 24 November 1880, earned him his doctoral degree with honours. Its primary sources consist for the greater part of the time-honoured classical texts on Meccan history which are preserved in the Leiden University library. But in addition to the digestion of these sources, Snouck Hurgronje came forward with several extremely provocative ideas on, and compelling interpretations of, the origin of the Islamic pilgrimage and the role of the prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham). These revolutionary ideas can be summarised to the effect that the pagan pilgrimage ritual of pre-Islamic Mecca was incorporated by the Prophet Muhammad into the new religion exclusively for reasons of opportunity, and that Ibrāhīm had only been chosen by him as the founding father of Islam because there is no text written by Abraham in the Old Testament which could contradict the Prophet Muhammad's claims to be the final recipient of the Divine Word. The necessity for doing so dated from the early days of the Prophet's mission, when he still had to assert himself against the criticism and hostility of the followers of both other, and earlier, monotheistic religions. Snouck Hurgronje's propositions stripped important episodes in Islam's sacred history of their sacredness, and reduced them to instances of opportunity, strategy and power politics. There is no place for a Divine revelation in this line of reasoning, and Snouck Hurgronje would adhere to this idea for the rest of his life. If, by the ideas propounded in his thesis, he had already transcended beyond the boundaries of philology proper, he would soon formulate far higher ambitions than his master De Goeje, who knew the Orient intimately from the armchair in his study and from his medieval sources, could ever have envisaged. When Snouck Hurgronje intimated to him that he intended to visit Arabia, possibly even Mecca itself, the quiet

philologist must have been horrified at the plans of his audacious pupil. Snouck Hurgronje's subsequent visit to Mecca, and more especially his monograph on Meccan history and society, published in 1888-1889 after his safe return to Leiden, made him instantly famous. He was a legend before he had even reached middle age. But more was to follow. Snouck Hurgronje was familiar with the first-hand description of Cairene society by E.W. Lane (1801-1876), which had been published on the basis of notes made during his stay in Cairo between 1833-1835.<sup>1</sup> Snouck Hurgronje may, among other things, have felt inspired by this particular style of ethnographical description, rather than by textual criticism and manuscript collation. Apart from being a gifted ethnographer and a sound philologist, Lane was also an accomplished artist, and the engraved images accompanying his description of the modern Egyptians added an impressive visual dimension to his words. Snouck Hurgronje may have felt inspired by the combination of words and images in Lane's description of the Egyptians, and he set out for Mecca with the intention of using the still novel invention of photography. There are also differences between the journeys of Snouck Hurgronje and Lane. Snouck Hurgronje did not even stay one full year in Arabia, and less than half of that in Mecca proper. Lane had had ample opportunity to organise his research and complete his work during his two journeys, which lasted about three years each. Living in the traditional Muslim part of Cairo as a Muslim with the adopted name Maṣṣūr, Lane encountered few difficulties. In order to make life easier and to avoid too many questions, he had fully integrated. He had

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<sup>1</sup> Lane's illustrated *Description of Egypt* remained unpublished for a long time. The first edition was published in Cairo in 2000. His classic, *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*, appeared in 1836 and is still in print today.

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# M E K K A

VON

DR. C. SNOUCK HURGRONJE.

MIT BILDER-ATLAS.

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON "DEET KONINKRIJK INSTITUUT VOOR DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE  
VAN NEDERLANDSCH-INDIË TE 'S-GRAVENHAGE."



I.

DIE STADT UND IHRE HERREN.

HAAG  
MARTINUS NIJHOFF  
1888.

[13] C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka. Mit Bilder-Atlas*. Haag, 1888-1889.  
Title page vol. I 'Die Stadt und ihre Herren.' See also p. 47.

married an Egyptian woman, Nafisa, who would later accompany him to England and remain his life companion. Mecca required a different approach altogether. Precisely because the sacred territory was forbidden to non-Muslims, it had attracted numerous adventurers in the course of its history. The authorities and the population in general were keen on discovering such intruders, who risked their lives if detected. Snouck Hurgronje was not one of these adventurers, since he did not come in disguise, but he always had to be on his guard in a town where the hatred of unbelievers was the prevailing state of mind. He was not overanxious about this, but he had to take several precautionary measures. After five and a half months in Mecca his life suddenly came into danger when the French vice-consul at Jeddah, De Lostalot, started circulating rumours about his presence in Mecca and his alleged activities as an archaeologist or dealer in antiquities. He had to leave Mecca immediately, and Arabia as well. Like Lane he had lived as a Muslim among Muslims, under an adopted Muslim name. Unlike Lane, however, he abandoned the woman with whom he had been living in Mecca, and whose identity has always remained unknown.

Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje was not a religious man. From almost every page of his monumental study on Mecca it becomes evident that he had little personal religious feeling, if any. Religion as a social phenomenon, however, fascinated him. His interest lay in finding an answer to the question how and to what extent people were willing to shape their private lives and social organisation according to what they regarded as God's commands.

Ever since Snouck Hurgronje published his illustrated monograph on Mecca, the book has continued to astonish its readers. Mecca was –and is– the Holy City to some, the Forbidden City to others. How could a young Western scholar succeed, and in such a short time, in being accepted by the

Meccans as one of them, and to write such a detailed and intimate description of Meccan society? About this episode Snouck Hurgronje has largely kept silent, and stories of legendary proportions were bound to come into circulation. For the present-day reader, Snouck Hurgronje's *Mekka* is a classic, but in many ways it is also a very modern book.<sup>2</sup> The second volume describes Meccan society in the 1880s, and as such it is an important historical source. Amazingly enough, it has remained the only comprehensive monograph on the subject so far, since Muslim sociologists have never ventured to describe life in the Holy City in secular terms. The lively, and at times humoristic, style used by Snouck Hurgronje to describe the motives and feelings of some of the inhabitants of Mecca keeps his narrative fresh and attractive. Its true modernity, however, lies in his ideas on how to live with people of different cultures and religions, and how to describe them.

The first volume of the original German-language edition (1888) is a historical study on the city of Mecca and its rulers. It reads as an account of more than a millennium of ruthless power-play and unrestrained greed in the city which is the heart of Islam. Snouck Hurgronje's realistic approach of the history of Mecca need not disturb us as being anti-Islamic, although a healthy distrust of Islam, and any other religion for that matter, is also part of his discourse. Muslim historians themselves are quite open-minded on the subject, very much in the same way as Roman Catholics think and speak about the secrets of the Vatican: most holy and most unholy often go hand in hand.

The second volume of *Mekka* contains Snouck Hurgronje's account of the public and private life of the Meccans, of the traditional educational system in the Great Mosque, and, last but not least, of the life of the *Jāwa* colony in Mecca, the

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<sup>2</sup> *Mekka*. The Hague 1888-1889 (2 vols., with portfolio).

Southeast Asians who had chosen to live in the Holy City for a while. This volume was written for a wider public, and it was greeted with a mixture of enthusiasm and sheer awe. It is still a classic of exploration and anthropology, and it received a visual dimension by the publication of a portfolio of images, some of which were made by Snouck Hurgronje himself. This fact made him the first European photographer of Mecca, and its second photographer ever, after the Egyptian officer and engineer Ṣādiq Bey (1822-1902). He was also the instructor of Mecca's third photographer, his namesake by coincidence, the Meccan doctor and naturalist 'Abd al-Ghaffār b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Baghdādī.<sup>3</sup> The latter thereby became the first native Meccan photographer of his home town. Photography was Snouck Hurgronje's visual dimension to his description of Mecca and its inhabitants in the same way as Lane had drawn the Egyptians fifty years earlier.

Snouck Hurgronje had come to Jeddah and Mecca for more than one reason. The most important was, of course, his intention to study Islam in all its aspects in its very centre, in an environment where it was least influenced by non-Islamic elements and where it was not under foreign rule. The pilgrimage needed to be studied as a social and therefore political phenomenon, regardless of the question if there was actual truth in the re-enactment of some dramatic episodes in Ibrāhīm's life and Divine mission (e.g. Hagar's despair, the sacrifice of Ismā'īl). However, Snouck Hurgronje had not come to Mecca in order to study the pilgrimage alone. Eventually, he did not even participate in the pilgrimage at all, since he was forced to leave Mecca just before the season. In his book he mentions, though rather summarily, the pilgrimage while

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<sup>3</sup> See now also Claude W. Sui, 'Die Pilgerfahrt zu den heiligen Stätten des Islam und die frühe Photographie', in: Alfried Wiczorek & Claude W. Sui (eds.), *Ins Heilige Land. Pilgerstätten von Jerusalem bis Mekka und Medina*, Heidelberg 2006, 40-63.

going through the ritual year, and he downplays its importance by characterising it as a ceremony of local relevance only, especially in comparison with that other main event on the ritual calendar of Islam, the fast of the month of Ramaḍān, which is celebrated by the worldwide community of Islam. For Mecca, however, the pilgrimage is unquestionably the main event of the year. Many Meccans had, and still have, to earn their yearly income in the short period of a few weeks during the pilgrimage, and in that season they obviously cannot devote their attention to anything else. In the rest of the year, however, it was as if they had different personalities. Meccan society outside the hectic pilgrimage season was, therefore, Snouck Hurgronje's main field of study. In this manner, Snouck Hurgronje presented an orientation that differed from what had attracted most other Western explorers to Mecca. In Europe, Mecca was the synonym of pilgrimage. Whereas most European travellers had focused on the pilgrimage, Snouck Hurgronje held that those who really wanted to learn about the ritual had better turn to the pilgrimage manuals, instead of mixing with the chaotic and confusing crowds of the pilgrimage itself. The episode immediately preceding Snouck Hurgronje's journey to Mecca may be treated here in some detail. He had landed in Jeddah on 28 August 1884, and soon proved to be a keen, sometimes quite cynical, observer of human nature. He did not have much belief in human idealism, and often detected ulterior, usually materialistic, motives behind religious acts. The study of living Islam in an undiluted environment was his prime objective, but he had also come to Jeddah and Mecca with a mission of a more practical nature. In the eyes of the European colonial powers with Muslim subjects, such as the Netherlands with its possessions in present-day Indonesia, Mecca had become a safe haven for fundamentalist activities ('Muslim fanatics,' as they were called in late 19th-century discourse). The city was seen as a place from whence

pan-Islamic ideas could radiate all over the Muslim world, a large part of which was under the control of infidel European nations. According to the precepts of Pan-Islamism, the Turkish Sultan-Caliph was not only the lord of his own subjects, but also the spiritual ruler of the hearts and minds of Muslims all over the world, as if he were an 'Islamic pope'. The whole idea was a clever ploy of the Ottomans and they eagerly exploited this wholly un-Islamic concept to their own political advantage. Obtaining up-to-date and accurate information about pan-Islamic ideas among the Jāwa, the Southeast Asian community in Mecca, was therefore deemed of prime importance by the Dutch government, and Snouck Hurgronje had taken it upon himself to acquire more intimate knowledge about them. In this respect there was yet another, more imminent reason for political fact-finding in Mecca: The Netherlands had found itself, from 1873 onwards, in a state of war of attrition against the Sultanate of Aceh, an independent state on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, and it was a war with strong Islamic overtones. Snouck Hurgronje's funds for his Meccan expedition had partly been allotted for the specific purpose of ascertaining the extent of ideological support of the war among segments of the Jāwa community in Mecca.

Finally, Snouck Hurgronje had come to Mecca with his academic background and scholarly interest. After all, he was a pupil of Michael Jan de Goeje, the grandmaster of the Leiden school of Oriental philology. It is therefore hardly surprising that he devoted a long chapter of his book on Mecca to intellectual life, or to what he called 'the University of Mecca', the rather loosely organised educational system operative within Mecca's Great Mosque. Here, too, he had a keen eye for human behaviour and he gave his readers their full share of his observations, not only on the curriculum, but also on academic competition and college intrigue, and the profitable symbiosis of scholars and rulers.

Once in Arabia, Snouck Hurgronje made his preparations for his visit to Mecca in several phases. First, he acquired as much local information on Mecca as possible, and he created for himself a circle of Muslim friends. He talked to many pilgrims coming back from Mecca (the feast had taken place on 1 October 1884), he made the acquaintance of people involved in the pilgrimage business, and he met with many inhabitants of Mecca and Jeddah. To them he must have been a Christian scholar with a remarkable knowledge of Arabic literature and Islamic law. Every day he spoke the Arabic vernacular with more fluency, and with the East Indian Muslims he could converse in Malay. The fact that he had brought his photographic equipment made him interesting as a potential maker of portraits. Especially at a time when photography was still a rare and miraculous art, photographic portraits were very much sought after. Snouck Hurgronje exploited photography to his advantage, and it may have acted as a catalyst for establishing relationships and breaking down social barriers. Nevertheless, its impact should, perhaps, not be overestimated. Snouck Hurgronje was not dependent on photography as a means to enter the houses of notables and officials, since the compelling personality of this learned new convert to Islam was interesting enough to achieve that. Already on his first day in Mecca it rained invitations. Be it as it may, photography was an added value to his presence. His next phase was the selection of a travel companion to Mecca, whose social network would guarantee a sufficient amount of personal safety. He had the choice out of several persons, but in the end he chose Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat (1854–1914), the scion of a noble family from Banten, a staunchly Islamic region in the far west of Java. Raden Aboe Bakar had been living and studying in Mecca for five years, and he had many acquaintances among the Jāwa. All these qualities made him a highly valuable contact. When he and Snouck Hurgronje first met he had already succeeded in

establishing a cordial relationship with the Dutch consul in Jeddah by providing the Dutch with ‘useful knowledge’ from Mecca, where they had no physical access. It was he who would, eventually, accompany Snouck Hurgronje on his momentous journey from Jeddah to Mecca, where he was also Snouck Hurgronje’s first host. A few years later this and other services earned him his reward from the Dutch government, a permanent post at the Dutch consulate in Jeddah. After Snouck Hurgronje’s departure from the Hijaz he would remain his confidential informant on Meccan and Hijazi affairs.<sup>4</sup>

In this second phase Snouck Hurgronje must have revealed to a select group of Muslim friends –and probably to some of his Dutch intimate friends in Jeddah as well– that he intended to convert to Islam and to study the sacred sciences in Mecca. In order to achieve this he first had to change his address in Jeddah. On the 1st of January 1885 he moved to a house of his own, where he lived together with Raden Aboe Bakar, away from the Dutch consulate, which till then had served as his home. The move was also a symbolic one: it marked the moment of his transition from his Christian religion to Islam. Snouck Hurgronje took on the Islamic name ‘Abd al-Ghaffār, ‘Servant of the All-Forgiving One’. In January 1885 he gradually started making his conversion public, among Muslims that is. On 5 January 1885 he wrote in his diary:

‘Important visit from Sayyid Muḥammad Muzayyin. In the evening the mail arrived with letters from Mother, Romburgh, Goedeljee, Bavinck, a postcard from Nöldeke, a piece about *qāt* and the Students’ Almanac.

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<sup>4</sup> See now Michael Laffan, ‘Writing from the colonial margin. The letters of Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje’, in *Indonesia and the Malay World* 31, No. 91 (November 2003), 357–380.

For circumcision, which is performed at very diverse ages (between about forty days and ten years), they use, as I learned from the *muzayyin* [barber, surgeon], a little iron  $\Lambda$ -shaped tweezer called *‘udda* [utensil] as a wound clasp for the prepuce, and a razor blade. For the treatment of the wound a *marḥam* [sic, probably *marham*, salve, ointment] is used (here they say: *الدرهم كالمراحم تجبر ألم الكسير* [dirhams are like ointments, they ease the pain of a broken bone]), which is a kind of haemostatic or curative substance. Our friend claimed to use *ṭalyūn*, which according to his own words is known as cantarion (or the like) in European pharmacies. It is applied to a piece of cloth which is then used to bandage the wounded area. After that a *dārūr* [application] is used as a siccative. There are several varieties of mixtures for this, ground to powder. Varieties of *حارة* [hot] and *باردة* [cold] are distinguished.<sup>5</sup>

It is a crucial passage and a hermetic one at the same time. The superficial reader of Snouck Hurgronje’s Jeddah diary can read it as just another of his many anthropological observations, this time with details on the custom of circumcision. However, why would this visit be so ‘important’ unless the circumcision was to be performed on Snouck Hurgronje himself? The passage on wound treatment, which immediately follows the passage on circumcision, makes it clear that the *muzayyin*, the barber, had not come for a haircut. Undergoing circumcision was an important detail of Snouck Hurgronje’s preparations for his journey to Mecca. He simply could not run the risk that a triviality like his foreskin would bring him into difficulties, and it was indeed checked when he entered the sacred territory a few weeks later.

On 16 January 1885 Snouck Hurgronje records a visit to Ismā’īl Efendī, the *qāḍī* of Jeddah, and others, apparently as a

<sup>5</sup> The Jeddah diary (in Dutch), MS Leiden Or. 7112, p. 43-44.

preparation for his imminent meeting with ‘Uthmān (Osman) Pasha, the Ottoman governor of the Hijaz, who was in Jeddah at the time. One may assume that his visit to the *qāḍī* also served to confirm his conversion to Islam in front of the mandatory witnesses. The governor was, of course, also aware of the visit to Mecca that this young westerner was going to make, and there was no secrecy in this. He had even ordered two *askaris*, soldiers, to accompany Snouck Hurgronje on the road from Jeddah to Mecca, which was not always safe. At such social gatherings, photography and portraiture were also discussed.

It has been argued that Snouck Hurgronje’s conversion to Islam may not have been genuine and that, by feigning that he had become a Muslim, he had acted in an insincere way towards all those in Jeddah and Mecca, and later in Indonesia as well, who had given him their unreserved trust and brotherly love. Snouck Hurgronje always avoided being explicit about it. In his letters to his mother, to his teacher M.J. de Goeje in Leiden, to his academic friends Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) in Strasbourg and Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) in Budapest, to his friend Van der Chijs in Jeddah, and some others as well, he was more straightforward, but always up to a certain point. For the agnostic expert of Islamic Law that Snouck Hurgronje was, Islam was a series of outward acts, to be performed without rational questioning, under certain conditions by which they became legally valid. In this sense he had certainly become a Muslim, quite literally ‘someone who practices submission’. Whether he was also a believer, a *mu’min*, someone with the inner conviction that Islam was the true and only possible religion, was a subject that Snouck Hurgronje considered as irrelevant for anyone but himself, since it was something between man and his Creator. God was the only One to look into the hearts of men and to judge accordingly. For the correct appreciation of Snouck Hurgronje’s study of daily life in Jeddah and Mecca as



observed by him in 1884-1885, the question of the sincerity of his conversion is an irrelevant one, although it remains a serious matter for Muslims.

After these lengthy and careful preparations he took the decision to depart from Jeddah. In the evening of Sunday 22 February 1885, after a full day's journey, he entered Mecca and performed the greeting ritual by circumambulating the Ka'ba. He kissed the black stone and drank the holy water of Zemzem. These were moments fraught with emotion, and he would never forget them in his entire life.

Snouck Hurgronje's preparations to travel to Mecca have been treated here in some detail, but a similar discussion of his stay in Mecca cannot be given here, if only for the simple fact that no day-to-day account of his stay in Mecca has been preserved among Snouck Hurgronje's scholarly notes. Yet, the surviving sources and the second volume of *Mekka* itself give us the impression that this volume can to a large extent be read as an autobiographical account written in the third person. He learned from many teachers how the sacred sciences were taught in Mecca's Great Mosque. On several occasions he mentions Mecca's most prominent scholar, Sayyid Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān (1817-1886), who came to visit him already on the day of his arrival in Mecca, like so many others who had heard of the arrival of the foreign scholar. Sayyid Aḥmad Daḥlān was the great-muftī of the Shāfi'ite school in Mecca and the dean of the other Meccan great-muftīs. Snouck Hurgronje styled him the 'chancellor of the University of Mecca.'<sup>6</sup>

Evidently, he participated in many private functions and public festivities, and he also sought the company of the Jāwa. He set up house and started to collect information.

<sup>6</sup> See now also Ulrike Freitag, 'Der Orientalist und der Mufti. Kulturcontact im Mekka des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Die Welt des Islams* 43 (2003), p. 37-60.

After a while, when he had made the acquaintance of the doctor 'Abd al-Ghaffār, who had been attached to the Sharī'a Court in Mecca as its chief medical officer since 1883, he saw possibilities for photography, and only then did he order his equipment and chemicals to be sent from Jeddah and Mecca. Together with his namesake he started to practice photography in a studio which he had set up in the house of the doctor. However, the possibilities for photography turned out to be limited, especially outdoors, which was problematic both for technical and religious reasons. In 1885 photography was still a novel art about which few had heard and for this reason alone it was suspect. Nevertheless, a few photographs were made, if only to earn some money.

Early August 1885, when 'Abd al-Ghaffār Efendi, as Snouck Hurgronje was called by his Muslim friends, received the order from the Turkish governor to leave Mecca and Arabia, all his expectations for a prolonged stay came suddenly to an end, and he had to devise strategies of damage control.<sup>7</sup> How bitterly he felt the truth of words of the Prophet Muhammad: 'Oh, Mecca, thou art to me the most beloved city in the world. If I had not been driven out of thee, I would never have departed from thee.'<sup>8</sup> It was the great catastrophe of his life and he would never see Mecca again. Although he must have realised all the time that his stay in Mecca was on borrowed time, he had not committed one letter of his book on Mecca to paper, limiting himself to conceiving the roughest outlines in his mind. First he had to save his notes and collections, and to see to it that his photographic equipment was

<sup>7</sup> The cause of this expulsion has been extensively described by Snouck Hurgronje, in 'Aus Arabien', and other articles, which were republished together in the 3rd volume of his *Verspreide geschriften* (Bonn/Leipzig 1923).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted and translated from a letter from C. Snouck Hurgronje, dated Leiden, Monday 10 January 1887, to P.N. van der Chijs in Jeddah (MS Leiden, Or. 8952).

preserved. Raden Aboe Bakar, the Meccan doctor 'Abd al-Ghaffār, and other friends like the Zawāwī family did their best to help him. In Jeddah Snouck Hurgronje received the best support he could have expected from the Dutch honorary vice-consul and shipping agent, P.N. van der Chijs, a wise man with whom he had already become close friends at Jeddah before he set out for Mecca, and who would become Snouck Hurgronje's closest confidant in the years to come. Between 1885 and 1889 Van der Chijs kept a steady stream going from Mecca, via Jeddah, to Leiden, supplying Snouck Hurgronje with information, photographs and ethnographical objects. It was also Van der Chijs who took care that the many questions that arose during the writing of the two volumes of *Mekka* received appropriate answers. A stream of learned articles on Meccan and Arabian subjects started to flow from Snouck Hurgronje's pen immediately after his return in Leiden, written no doubt on the basis of his field notes. The most lively of these was his annotated collection of seventy-seven Meccan proverbs and sayings.<sup>9</sup> The two volumes on Mecca, which would make him one of the most famous explorers of Mecca, were written in Leiden, not in Mecca itself. The Meccan episode is an important, if not the most important, episode in Snouck Hurgronje's life. In these intensely lived five months he made friends for life.

The final pages of the last chapter of *Mekka* were rightly interpreted by the Minister of Colonial Affairs, L.W.C. Keuchenius, as an application for a position in the colonies. In fact, Snouck Hurgronje set sail for the Netherlands East Indies in 1889. He did not visit Jeddah on the way because a stop was not scheduled, and he came not even in sight of the shore of Western Arabia. But lying in his cabin on board the

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<sup>9</sup> 'Mekkanische Sprichwörter und Redensarten', in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 5e volgrees, deel 1 (1886), p. 443-576.

*Massilia* of the P&O Line, he must have mused with some nostalgia about his eventful days in Jeddah and Mecca. During his seventeen years of intensive work, mostly in Batavia, he played an important role as government advisor on indigenous, Arab and Islamic affairs. His Meccan connections had given him insight in Muslim life and continued doing so. Both his superiors in the colonies and many of his native and Arab friends were to profit from his expertise. In 1906, however, he may have sensed that he had outstayed his welcome in the colonies or that his colonial career had reached a cul-de-sac. He grasped the opportunity to repatriate. In 1885 he had left his Meccan spouse behind; this time he left without his Sundanese family. He succeeded his teacher M.J. de Goeje and from 1906 till 1927 he enjoyed the Leiden professorship with great gusto.

On 29 March 1906 he embarked on the Royal Navy frigate *Koningin Regentes* which would take him back to Holland. Again, as on his voyage to the East Indies in 1889, he did not disembark in Jeddah, although the frigate may have stopped there. Already before his return journey he had developed ambitious ideas for an anthropological and ethnomusicological study of the Hijaz. Evidently, Mecca had never been far from his mind, nor from his heart. He arranged for the making of sound recordings, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as much of a novelty as photography had been in the 1880s. At his request informants wrote down a great variety of texts: geographical surveys, *fatwās* on sound recording of the Qur'an, popular song texts, lists of manuscripts in Hijazi libraries, etc., etc. In the end, however, little or nothing came of all this in the form of scholarly publications. University life (and later on also old age) had requirements of their own, and he may have underestimated these. The publication of the English translation of the second volume of *Mekka* in 1931 was a last and final act of interest and of recollection of a period that had meant so much to him in his late twenties.

Snouck Hurgronje's arrival in the Netherlands East Indies and his work as government advisor on indigenous and Arab affairs have greatly contributed towards a concerted and better-informed colonial policy towards Islam. His stay in Mecca had made him into a figure of almost mythical dimensions, and his successful co-operation with general J.B. van Heutsz (1851-1924) in the subjugation of Aceh further contributed to his fame.

The modern reader who browses through the edition of Snouck Hurgronje's official advices, many of them written during his seventeen years of uninterrupted service in Batavia,<sup>10</sup> and who reads the spin-off of his advisory work in his many scholarly articles on a wide range of subjects,<sup>11</sup> can only be impressed by the author's energy and genius, his enormous knowledge, his practical insight and common sense. Many of his advices were adopted by the colonial authorities in the East Indies, and later by the Government in The Hague. As a matter of fact, the thematically arranged edition of Snouck Hurgronje's official advices can be read as a history of Indonesian Islam around the turn of the century, seen, of course, from the point of view of the colonial ruler. Snouck Hurgronje's advice on the termination of the Aceh war is a case in point and it was as clear as it was harsh and effective. Advocating a drastic change of war tactics, Snouck Hurgronje recommended active warfare against the enemy instead of the hitherto followed policy of confinement behind a limited front line. The real enemy should be singled out, not the powerless Sultan, nor the aristocracy. The real adversaries of the Dutch were the 'ulamā, the Islamic scholars. An attempt should be made to appease those who

<sup>10</sup> *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje 1889-1936*, uitgegeven door E. Gobée en C. Adriaanse. Den Haag 1957-1965 (3 vols.), RGP, kleine serie, vols. 31, 34, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Many of these have been collected in *Verspreide geschriften van C. Snouck Hurgronje*. Bonn/Leipzig, Leiden 1923-1927 (7 vols.).

wished to co-operate with the Dutch (the Sultan and the aristocracy), but those who would not be appeased should be hit hard, since it is the only way to gain their respect. Atrocities should be avoided, as they cause more harm than good. Finally, an active policy should be pursued for the economic and social reconstruction of Aceh. With the benefit of hindsight, however, one can also detect a certain naiveté in Snouck Hurgronje's work. The final chapter in his work on the Acehnese<sup>12</sup> is titled 'The future of Islam'.<sup>13</sup> Its argument runs more or less along the following lines: 'The most important element of Acehnese Islam is *Jihād*, Holy War. In the past, *Jihād* has brought Islam a great empire. At present, however, the forces of *Jihād* have become counter-productive. Islam has lost the power to impose its law on other peoples. Nowadays, Europe rules the civilised world. Progressive secularisation of the Islamic world puts an end to *Jihād* as a viable option.' To elucidate his argument, Snouck Hurgronje compared Islam with Judaism, which had gone through a similar development. Nowadays, the rules of Jewish Law are also impossible to implement. The role of the Qur'an provides another example. Originally, three types of texts could be distinguished in the Qur'an: texts on lawgiving for the solution of burning problems in the early Muslim community; narrative parts, providing a sacred history to the new religion; and finally exhortation and reflection, providing a source of theology and a code of morals. From a powerful inspirational text, says Snouck Hurgronje, the Qur'an has now become a sacred chant. Its contents is not followed anymore, but only recited and studied. The other

<sup>12</sup> *De Atjèhers*, Batavia/Leiden 1893-1895 (2 vols. and a portfolio with photographs).

<sup>13</sup> Volume 2 of *De Atjèhers* was published in 1894. Snouck Hurgronje had borrowed this title from *The future of Islam* by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (London 1882), which was one of the books which he had brought with him to Mecca.

laws and institutions of Islam will share the same fate; their *study* will gradually take the place of their *practice*. At the same time, *Jihād* cannot be abolished either. It can never be declared obsolete, even if it is not one of the five pillars of Islam. It therefore remains a useful instrument in the hands of any Islamic government.

Snouck Hurgronje saw *Jihād* as an impediment to the secularisation of public and international law and order. According to the same line of reasoning one can maintain that the Qur'an, with its status of the literal Word of God, has also become an impediment to progress. Once, this status gave it a headstart; now it makes Islam in the eyes of many non-Muslims and even many modern Muslims, a primitive and even barbaric religion. But even in modern times, Muslims will never maintain that Islamic Law should be made obsolete. Rather, they will view the Law as an unattainable ideal. If they wish to study it in depth, they will be admired for their effort, but their example will not be widely followed. The Law is hardly applicable and remains, with a few exceptions, unapplied.

These final words in the book on the Acehnese, dating from 1894, already herald Snouck Hurgronje's ideas about how the future of Islam should take shape, namely by gradually giving the indigenous population of the colony the possibilities of self-rule, 'association' in Snouck Hurgronje's own words. This is not the same as autonomy, and certainly not the same as independence. The latter concept may never have crossed Snouck Hurgronje's mind as a serious option for the future. Snouck Hurgronje's belief in progress, in secularism, in westernisation, is expressed here for the first time in full. He would repeat these ideas time and again, and he saw Western education as the essential condition for westernisation. Yet, this westernisation did not imply a negation of Islam; the change of Islam would be effected from within. His ideas about colonial policy towards Islam can be summarised in a

few main themes: Do not interfere with Islamic dogmatics. Do not impose restrictions on the practice of Islam, including the pilgrimage. Be constantly aware of ideas circulating within the Islamic community. Do not give Islam the opportunity to spread to subjects which we consider as secular. Oppose Pan-Islamism and work towards association and emancipation. This is what Snouck Hurgronje told the students of the Civil Service Academy in The Hague in 1911. Now, almost a century later, his advice is as sound as when it was given, albeit under entirely different circumstances; and then as now it had its opponents, both among Muslims and non-Muslims.

His belief in the inevitability of secularism was beautiful, but was it also realistic? Islamic and nationalist movements were closely monitored and often dissolved by the colonial authorities. Their leaders were imprisoned and exiled. In the Dutch ideas about 'association' there was no place for Indonesians who refused to associate. For centuries, 'Divide et impera' had been the device of the Dutch, first to transform the colony into a unity and an economically viable project, and later, with the progress of ethical awareness, into a territory that by way of the moral education of the indigenous peoples could become an equal and associated part of a Dutch Commonwealth. However, what such a commonwealth exactly meant, nobody before 1942 could tell, and from that year onwards the question became irrelevant. Indonesia's independence, achieved according to some on August 17, 1945, according to others on December 27, 1949, was then still beyond the wildest dreams of practically all Dutch, and of many Indonesians as well, for that matter.