

Malays in the holy land: an ethnolinguistic study

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Abstrak

Malays in the Holy Land is an ethnolinguistic study of Malay settlers in Mecca, Madinah and Jeddah, based on research undertaken by the authors in 2014. Narration from the people themselves of their background history and community life had resulted in a wealth of data depicting a historical landscape of maintenance and shift of language use and lifestyle of three generations of informants. Where there used to be a strong inclination to adopt and adapt to the Arab lifestyle inclusive of language use, there now appears to be a revitalisation among the younger generation in the use of Malay in preparation for their return to the Malay world, a situation motivated by a more stringent policy of the Saudi government in offering foreign settlers' citizenship and permanent residence.

According to history, Malays became Muslims circa the 10th century C.E. However, there is no record as to when they first went to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam. Given the fact that Malays were known as sea-faring people and had the ability to build sailing ships that plied the oceans it would not be too far-fetched to infer that their venture to the Holy Land could have taken place before the arrival of steam ships, in the way sailing ships of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English made their journey to the Malay world. This inference is supported by *Sejarah Melayu* (also known as *The Malay Annals*), written in the 17th century, which makes mention of people who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. If there ever was a possibility for pilgrims from the Malay Peninsula and the islands to sail to Jeddah, or even part of the way before continuing their journey on land to Mecca, the number for a single year would have been rather small.

The availability of the steam ship as a commercial form of transport in the latter half of the 19th century was undoubtedly a factor which gave an impetus not only to the flow of Malay pilgrims to Mecca but also to students in their pursuit of religious education there. Among pilgrims and students there were those who stayed back and made Mecca their home. Over time the community of Malay settlers in Mecca grew in size to become what it is today. This book is about this very community which had its beginning, most probably in the second half of the 19th century. It is about the life of the people who call themselves Malays: the type of life they lead, their reasons for staying there, their interaction among themselves and with those outside their group, the shift and maintenance that they undergo in terms their primordial language and culture, and expectations they have for the future. There have been publications in the form of articles in Malaysian newspapers and magazines on Malays in Mecca. However, these are general descriptions arising from interactions between writers and individuals living in Mecca. To our knowledge there have not been any in-depth study of settlers of Malay origin there.