

“Such a Method of Doing Business”:
Local Shipping Agents, the Hajj, and the Divide between Corporate and Colonial Priorities in
Late 1870s Jeddah

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Abstract

Captain George de Jong Beyts served as the British consul in Jeddah from 1874 through 1878. He was also a shipping agent, sent to Jeddah to organize steamships for the British India Steam Navigation Company (BI) and increase the company's involvement in hajj transport. Later, British colonial officials would remember these years as a time of scandal and controversy, resulting from Beyts' personal conflict of interest as both government official and merchant. This story has been preserved in scholarship, where Beyts' tumultuous years in the consulate have become synonymous with the failure of BI's experiment in pilgrim transport. However, these portrayals ignore the importance of both corporate priorities and local power for hajj transport networks through Jeddah. This thesis looks at Beyts' narrative as evidence of the importance of local hajj networks and their connections to British corporate priorities.

Specifically, analysis of BI and British Foreign Office archives reveals the importance of Beyts' partnership with a local Hadrami merchant named Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff. Together, Alsagoff and Beyts chartered steamships and organized hajj transport between Jeddah and Singapore during the late 1870s. Their business adventures were quite successful, yet their combined interests ran counter to an increasing British regulation of native steamship passengers and the hajj. The scandals that worried the British government resulted from the combination of this regulation and Beyts' reliance on Alsagoff's local power. However, Beyts and Alsagoff's relationship ultimately proved more important to BI interests than support of the government. In this way, this relationship between businessmen challenges conceptual separations between local hajj networks and European shipping industries in the 1870s Indian Ocean.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, hajj, Jeddah, British Empire, steamships, Hadrami, Singapore

To my grandfather.

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Introduction

On the 29th of October 1873, the British Foreign Office received a request from a prominent Scottish businessman, a Mr. William Mackinnon, chairman and founder of the British India Steam Navigation Company (BI). He suggested a mutually beneficial arrangement: the appointment of BI's agent George de Jong Beyts to an empty consular post in Jeddah. Mr. Mackinnon's growing steamship company was preparing to establish a twice-weekly mail and passenger route through Jeddah, an Ottoman-controlled port on the Red Sea where for centuries Muslim pilgrims from around the Indian Ocean had stopped on their journeys to the Hejaz.¹ Mr. Mackinnon wanted to become more involved in the business of transporting Muslim pilgrims across the Indian Ocean and thought his efforts would benefit from the help of a British official in Jeddah, protecting British economic interests.² Unfortunately, the Foreign Office had faced issues finding a British official to serve as their consular representative in Jeddah – in fact, by 1873 the position had been vacant for several years.³ Mr. Mackinnon's proposal, then, solved multiple problems. The Foreign Office appointed Captain Beyts as the British Consul in Jeddah, since clearly “the advantage of combining the consular duties with those of the agency of the British India Steam Company was self-evident.”⁴

¹ For the historical role of Jeddah in the hajj, see Pearson, *Pious Passengers*; Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*. For Jeddah generally in this time period, see Freitag, “The City and the Stranger: Jeddah in the Nineteenth Century”; Dubois, “The Red Sea Ports During the Revolution in Transportation, 1800-1914.”

² Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and His Business Network, 1823-1893*, 167.

³ Freitag, “Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers?,” 360.

⁴ Adolphus Warburton Moore, “Jeddah Consulate.-- Captain Beyts.” Memorandum, April 23, 1877, IOR/L/PS/18/B16, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023576011.0x000004.

Five years later, however, the benefits of a British consul engaged simultaneously in trade and colonial oversight were perhaps less than “self-evident” for the British government. Captain Beyts’ attempts to manage pilgrimage traffic in Jeddah had led to several public scandals and a slew of angry merchants and British officials. Beyts continuously challenged the decisions of British shipping authorities, engaged in public disputes with pilgrimage brokers via local newspapers, and traded accusations of misconduct with other European consuls in Jeddah.⁵ In 1878 British officials finally found a replacement for Beyts and revoked his title of Consul. According to existing scholarship on the maritime hajj, Beyts’ removal also brought an end to BI’s dealings in the Indian Ocean hajj, as the business had proven too messy and complicated to deserve company resources.⁶ The British government decided to avoid using consuls who traded in Jeddah and blamed the scandals of the 1870s entirely on conflict of interest.⁷

As presented, the story at hand is one of a problematic bureaucrat within the British colonial system and the brief but unsuccessful corporate ventures of a British shipping company. This narrative seems logical enough at first glance; yet, its simplicity and lack of context invite investigation and questioning. Why was Beyts’ consulship so apparently dysfunctional for both his corporate and colonial employers? Perhaps he truly was set up to fail – perhaps his dual interests meant that scandal was inevitable, as colonial officials claimed, and the story ends there.⁸ However, this view shines a spotlight solely on Beyts’ agency, providing a convenient

⁵ Beyts’ various scandals are meticulously recorded in the Foreign Office records for Jeddah, kept in The National Archives at Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter referred to as TNA). Beyts’ actions appear primarily in FO 78/2519, 78/2649, and 78/2870. The details of these scandals will play a central role in the analysis of the first two chapters.

⁶ Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and His Business Network, 1823-1893*, 167.

⁷ Lord Salisbury to Consul Beyts, 1 November 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA; Freitag, “Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers?,” 360. Moore, “Jeddah Consulate.-- Captain Beyts,” 12.

⁸ Moore, “Jeddah Consulate.-- Captain Beyts.”

explanation of misconduct that absolves the British government from being implicated in religion-related scandals. The logical colonial incentive for portraying Beyts' incidents as an isolated and quickly solved problem necessitates reevaluation of this narrative. This apparent use of Beyts as a scapegoat disconnects his story from the complex milieu of clashing interests, colonial structures, and strong local actors in 1870s Jeddah.

The absence of local merchants and Arab actors stands out as a significant issue in Beyts' colonially told story. For example, an Arab businessman named Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff features prominently in Beyts' preserved correspondence with the British Foreign Office despite not being connected with him in existing scholarship.⁹ As a powerful local leader who wielded immense control over hajj traffic from Singapore, Alsagoff appears central to understanding the pressures and dynamics of 1870s Jeddah. Most importantly, the relationship between Beyts and Alsagoff provides a window into the interplay between European business interests, colonial agendas, and local power. The present study aims to reframe Beyts' narrative in these terms, arguing that local hajj transport networks gained power over European-managed ones when various sets of private business and colonial interests conflicted with each other. Although local power is absent in the colonial narratives of scandal, Beyts' actions and priorities were often determined in light of Alsagoff's power and influence.

Analysis of Captain Beyts and Syed Mohammed Alsagoff's relationship challenges scholarly tendencies to treat colonial European and native interests as distinct in the context of the colonial order. This trend is especially evident given the hajj scholarship that mentions Alsagoff during the 1880s. Several years after Beyts' consulate fiasco, Alsagoff appears again in

⁹ Many spellings of Alsagoff's name exist. The spelling used here is the one most commonly used in the records of the Jeddah consulate, as well as being the spelling that Alsagoff himself uses alongside his Arabic signature in letters to the consulate (سيد محمد بن عمر السقف). For example, see Syed Alsagoff to H. B. M's Consul, Jeddah, January 14, 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

colonial records for his control over the hajj between Singapore and the Hejaz, control that evolved into a monopoly and united the interests of many individuals from the current study.¹⁰ Due to this monopoly, Alsagoff certainly appears on the radar of British officials in memoranda and earns references in scholarship on the colonial hajj. Yet in these references his power is a generally accepted fact, presented as distinct from colonial interactions with the hajj.¹¹ His power appears isolated from his surroundings in the same way that Beyts' scandals are presented as self-contained.

In contrast, this study will look at the relationship between Beyts and Alsagoff in the 1870s as evidence of the inseparability of local and corporate European interests and the mutual reliance of their respective actors on each other. The 1870s witnessed Alsagoff's accumulation of business influence and Beyts' scandalous loss of consular power as part and parcel of their shared interests. Furthermore, despite significant power shifts in favor of Alsagoff's network in the early 1880s, the current study will argue that in the 1870s both local and European merchants equally benefitted from local power in the hajj business. Alsagoff and Beyts' interests aligned, mutually opposed to overarching colonial intentions and regulation. However, these interests and actors first require context and placement within the Indian Ocean world of the late 19th century.

Historical Context

The late nineteenth century in the Indian Ocean was a time of immense change and transition, especially for colonial governments. British power in the region was increasing following the expansion of steamship routes and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.¹²

¹⁰ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 316.

¹¹ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 95–96; Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*, 117.

¹² Low, "Empire and the Hajj," 269.

Steamships gained dominance in the 1870s, expanding the reach of European shipping companies and replacing sailing vessels as cheaper, faster, and more reliable transport. This easy ocean travel was leading to a dramatic upsurge in the number of Muslims participating in the hajj from colonially controlled regions such as British India, the Dutch East Indies, and the British Straits Settlements. Increased traffic from a wider section of the Muslim population was associated with the growing problem of ‘destitute pilgrims’, or individuals (often from India) who made it to Mecca but did not have the resources to return home, often becoming stranded in Jeddah.¹³ At the same time several cholera outbreaks originating in the Ottoman Hejaz, often tied to these poorer pilgrims, had triggered pan-European sanitation conferences and Western calls for regional governments to increase sanitation-minded restrictions on Muslim pilgrims.¹⁴ The British government specifically had been loath to implement any form of regulation, citing fears of potential Indian retaliation against any interference with Islamic practice.¹⁵ However, a major international cholera outbreak in 1865 contributed to the British decision to regulate pilgrim traffic on steamships and thereby limit disease transmission.¹⁶ In 1870 the British government in India passed the first of many Native Passenger Ship Acts, placing passenger restrictions on

¹³ Destitute pilgrims, or ‘pauper pilgrims’ have served as a focus in much recent scholarship on the hajj. See Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*; Singha, “Passport, Ticket, and India-Rubber Stamp: ‘The Problem of the Pauper Pilgrim’ in Colonial India c. 1882-1925”; Low, “Empire and the Hajj.”

¹⁴ The racialized undertones of Western fears around cholera make these claims of the problems with disease in the Hedjaz somewhat suspect. Tagliacozzo, “Hajj in the Time of Cholera,” 65; Low, “Empire and the Hajj,” 269–71.

¹⁵ Green, “The Hajj as Its Own Undoing,” 196.

¹⁶ The direct correlation between cholera outbreaks and European motives to intervene in the hajj has been often stated but deserves skepticism (see also n.14). Especially for the British, cholera presents as a fairly convenient excuse to exert control, especially given the historical implications of the hajj for Ottoman power in the region. For a nuanced exploration of British incentives to intervene in the hajj in light of international tensions, see Low, “The Mechanics of Mecca,” 7-10. Other scholars have argued that regulation was a response to the strength of Muslim shipping interests in the region. Oishi, “Friction and Rivalry over Pious Mobility: British Colonial Management of the Hajj and Reaction to It by Indian Muslims, 1870-1920,” 172.

steamship travel and beginning what historian Michael Low terms an ‘indirect interference’ in the hajj.¹⁷

The 1870s served as a decade of growing pains, as shifts in technology and patterns of movement across the ocean went along with new forms of colonial regulation and changes in the experiences of pilgrims.¹⁸ However, the decade should simultaneously be considered one of continuity, especially where non-European trading networks and individuals such as Alsagoff are concerned. Alsagoff and his family were members of an ethnic, mercantile, and religious group known as the ‘Hadrami diaspora’ or ‘Hadrami network’. This terminology refers to a large set of well-connected families living across and around the Indian Ocean, whose ancestors originated in the Hadramaut region of present-day Yemen. Many of these families gained wealth and prominence through mercantile activity in places such as the Red Sea, the East African coast and horn regions, the Malabar Coast in India, and Southeast Asia.¹⁹ These cross-ocean connections and familial ties continued to drive merchant networks for families such as Alsagoff’s, which had roots in Singapore, Jeddah, Mecca, and Suakin specifically.²⁰ Such relationships, alongside the valued reputation of the Hadrami diaspora, played an important role in Alsagoff’s hajj transport business activities.

Alsagoff’s home base of Singapore was an important hub through which many Southeast Asian pilgrims traveled on their way to Jeddah and the Hejaz. Although much of Southeast Asia

¹⁷ It should be noted that although 1870 marked the beginnings of legislation, British refusal to “intervene” with regulation on pilgrims themselves (such as with passports) continued and became a matter of contention in the public eye during the 1880s. Low, “The Infidel Piloting the True Believer”; Low, “The Mechanics of Mecca,” 303–4.

¹⁸ For example, Nile Green argues that shifts in technology made the hajj a different experience for pilgrims themselves, involving new forms of integration with outside communities. Green, “The Hajj as Its Own Undoing,” 193–94.

¹⁹ Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora*, 26.

²⁰ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” 118.

was part of the Dutch Netherlands through the 19th century, the British had established a presence in Singapore in 1819. Until World War II, the British controlled this region and a small area straddling the Straits of Malacca, known collectively as the Straits Settlements. The British presence in Singapore provided opportunities for Hadrami merchant families, whose growing power was closely tied to the region's rise as a major center for maritime transport in the 1870s.²¹ Alsagoff and his uncle played an important role in this growth, expanding the family's involvement in the hajj transportation market and in 1872 founding the first steamship company registered out of Singapore. The power of Alsagoff's family and his personal influence in the Red Sea increased over the 1870s. By the 1880s, Alsagoff's success enabled him to organize the previously mentioned monopoly over hajj traffic, involving merchants from Dutch, Ottoman, British and Hadrami circles.²² However, during the 1870s this accumulation of power was still in transition and control over profits from hajj transport was not firmly established, as the merchants who would soon work together competed with each other for passengers and profits.

While the Hadrami diaspora is often portrayed as representing a 'traditional' merchant network on the Indian Ocean (which is then superseded by a 'modern' European one), many Hadrami families gained or maintained power during the colonial era through integration with European systems. These families simultaneously used colonial structures and contributed to making British mercantile networks, forming an interdependent relationship which brings into question the distinction between local and European trajectories. For example, several Hadrami families in Singapore gained prominence in Singapore following British ethnic regulations which

²¹ Freitag, 118–19; Othman, "The Arabs Migration and Its Importance in the Historical Development of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Malaya," 20.

²² Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia*, 101; Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 314–20.

gave Arab individuals access to cheap land.²³ British law also enabled these families to establish trust funds that could accumulate family wealth while still following Muslim inheritance laws.²⁴ Alsagoff, for his part, combined the long-standing strength of the Hadrami network with an openness to using steamship technology, a strategy which upheld themes of continuity alongside those of change. Powerful Hadrami individuals like Alsagoff counter narratives which portray European business as a ‘modern’ replacement of ‘traditional’ trade networks.²⁵

Alongside Alsagoff, one of the European businesses competing in this setting for economic power in the 1870s was the previously-mentioned British India Steam Navigation Company (BI). In 1861, the Scotsman William Mackinnon founded BI in an attempt to expand the reach of his shipping and transport business in the Indian Ocean, which had previously been confined to the Bay of Bengal. Quickly a major player in the Indian Ocean region, BI relied on favorable government mail contracts to keep passenger and freight rates lower than their competition.²⁶ Although most of these contracts were British, the company also entered agreements with and transported goods for other colonial governments, such as the Portuguese.²⁷ After founding the shipping company, Mackinnon and his business partner William Mackenzie acted as BI’s managing agents, organizing BI’s fleet directly from their office in Calcutta. While communicating with the company’s London-based board through the company secretary, Mackinnon was directly involved in both large-scale business decisions and small-scale ship movement. These weekly communications between Mackinnon and the secretary, preserved in

²³ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” 112.

²⁴ Freitag, 120.

²⁵ Low, “The Mechanics of Mecca,” 318.

²⁶ Jones, “British India Steamers and the Trade of the Persian Gulf, 1862-1914,” 25.

²⁷ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 30 December 1875, BIS/6/21, National Maritime Museum (hereafter referred to as NMM).

the company archives, provide a wealth of information regarding BI's priorities, concerns, and interests.

As the company's shipping lines expanded, Mackinnon hired several regional agents, such as Captain Beyts, to manage BI's shipping at various ports.²⁸ These local agents were responsible for filling ships with passengers, livestock, and freight; managing the extensive bureaucratic paperwork required for the ships and wares; and also protecting ships from dangerous cargo (such as gunpowder).²⁹ Beyts served as BI's agent in both Suez and Jeddah, earning this role due to his long career captaining merchant ships along the Malabar Coast of India. Mackinnon admired Beyts for his knowledge of local languages and experience with native merchants and crew.³⁰ The London board, at Mackinnon's recommendation, entrusted Beyts with determining the best approach to business in the Red Sea, relying on his judgement to select ships, schedules, and ideal destinations.³¹ Beyts led BI to invest more heavily in supporting hajj involvement in the Red Sea, including directing time and financial resources towards refitting ships and finding new crew that would function better with native passengers.³² Unfortunately, only vague references exist regarding Beyts' life prior to 1874, leaving gaps in knowledge of his personal life, origins, and the career that earned him respect within BI. Regardless, BI officials clearly turned to him as an expert in the region. In the 1870s Beyts' position in the consulate made him a figure of interest at BI board meetings and in Mackinnon's correspondence with the company secretary.

²⁸ Jones, *Two Centuries Of Overseas Trading*, 45.

²⁹ Jones, 46.

³⁰ Moore, "Jeddah Consulate.-- Captain Beyts."

³¹ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 15 January 1874, BIS/6/17, NMM; M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 18 February 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM.

³² M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 6 January 1876, BIS/6/22.

The complex dynamics of the 19th century Indian Ocean represent the intersection of many distinct individuals, businesses, cities, and governments. At the same time, stories in this context are inherently enmeshed narratives of movement and fluid boundaries. Attempts to encapsulate such an intersectional paradigm are at some level fated to be oversimplified. The individuals presented above each represent a larger group while simultaneously casting doubts on the distinctions between these groups. Beyts and Alsagoff, their companies, and their mercantile network(s) can all be defined in isolation or entirely through external connections and interactions. As a result, the contextual web underlying the story at hand is infinitely complex, interconnected, and difficult to parse. Fortunately, however, large bodies of scholarship and brilliant scholars have also tried to tackle and generate frameworks around these types of issues and questions in the Indian Ocean.

Intellectual Context

In 1982, the first major scholar to discuss the 19th century Indian Ocean hajj framed the above context in terms of a dual threat to European colonial powers: “sanitation and security.”³³ In other words, the hajj was significant to colonial powers because of its threat of spreading cholera and the worry that the hajj encouraged pan-Islamic and therefore anti-colonial resistance. William Roff’s seminal article was the first attempt to use British colonial records to analyze the role of the hajj during imperialism, and subsequent literature has frequently responded to his categorizations, either upholding or actively contesting them.³⁴ Two of the ways that more recent

³³ Originally published in 1982 but republished in 2009. Roff, “Sanitation and Security : The Imperial Powers and the Nineteenth Century Hajj.”

³⁴ Low, “Empire and the Hajj,” 272. For examples based on similar paradigms to Roff, see Low, “Empire and the Hajj”; Tagliacozzo, “Hajj in the Time of Cholera”; Mishra, *Pilgrimage, Politics, and Pestilence the Haj from the Indian Subcontinent, 1860-1920*; Harrison, “Quarantine, Pilgrimage and Colonial Trade: India 1866-1900.” For works actively attempting to counter Roff’s work, see Green, “The Hajj as Its Own Undoing”; Low, “The Infidel Piloting the True Believer”; Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*; Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*.

scholarship has attempted to deviate from the framework established in Roff is through the study of other relevant actors from outside imperial bureaucracies, such as destitute pilgrims or corporate maritime structures. In the past couple of years, several scholars have concentrated on the intersection of these two themes, although Muslims themselves (including both destitute pilgrims and Muslims involved in organizing pilgrimages) are often absent in foundational works on the corporate maritime hajj.³⁵ Fortunately, this trend has been shifting, as recent scholars have focused on the roles of Muslims within the British bureaucracy and from the Ottoman perspective.³⁶

Unfortunately, several parameters have tended to restrict studies of the 19th century Indian Ocean hajj. Despite a well-established push in Indian Ocean scholarship toward Braudelian conceptualizations of geographically-oriented history, relevant hajj scholarship has developed largely along colonial and regional lines.³⁷ The major set of recent monographs each focus on a single colonial empire, including the British, Dutch, and Russian approaches to hajj management.³⁸ Other works that occasionally look at multiple empires generally take up one of Roff's original themes, either focusing on cholera or anti-colonial movements.³⁹ In contrast, relevant branches of scholarship such as those on the Hadrami Diaspora, steamship networks,

³⁵ See especially Low, "The Infidel Piloting the True Believer"; Green, "The Hajj as Its Own Undoing." Radhika Singha notes that maritime scholars such as Michael Miller have overlooked the interactions between pauper pilgrims and corporate interests. Singha, "Passport, Ticket, and India-Rubber Stamp: 'The Problem of the Pauper Pilgrim' in Colonial India c. 1882-1925," 50, n.24.

³⁶ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca"; Low, "The Infidel Piloting the True Believer"; Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*; Tagliacozzo, "Hajj in the Time of Cholera"; Green, "The Hajj as Its Own Undoing."

³⁷ Anderson, "Process Geographies' of Mobility and Movement in the Indian Ocean."

³⁸ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*; Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*; Kane, *Russian Hajj*.

³⁹ Harrison, "Quarantine, Pilgrimage and Colonial Trade: India 1866-1900"; Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*; Mishra, *Pilgrimage, Politics, and Pestilence the Haj from the Indian Subcontinent, 1860-1920*; Tagliacozzo, "Hajj in the Time of Cholera."

and subaltern stories have been at the forefront of the shift in Indian Ocean scholarship towards ‘process geographies’.⁴⁰ In this work, scholars approach the Indian Ocean as a catalyst for the movement of ideas and people, and define geographic spaces based on the processes (such as trade and travel) and connections that the geography enables. The hajj should be seen as one such process, a movement of people that unites and works to define the concept of the Indian Ocean as an entity. Yet, while some scholarship approaches the pre-colonial hajj this way, works on the hajj during the colonial era are often so focused on interpreting colonial fears and intentions that the unity and movement of the Indian Ocean becomes lost.

Hadrami scholarship especially stands out as an area where this separation between Indian Ocean scholarship and hajj scholarship proves problematic. Despite recognition that the colonial image of ‘modern’ European trade networks replacing ‘traditional’ Hadrami ones is flawed, discussions of the Hadrami network as an entity during the colonial hajj are largely absent. In works on Hadrami networks, the general importance of hajj organization is certainly noted.⁴¹ Yet, while occasional Hadrami individuals win a reference in hajj-focused texts, conceptions of the network’s prominence as a whole during the colonial period rarely permeate across these sub-fields.⁴² The Hadrami network too often becomes relegated to discussions of the pre-colonial hajj.⁴³ One of the goals of the present study is to push back against this separation,

⁴⁰ Anderson, “‘Process Geographies’ of Mobility and Movement in the Indian Ocean”; Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*; Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*; Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920*; Gelvin and Green, *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*; Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*.

⁴¹ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography.”

⁴² One counterexample to this trend that should be noted is Low, “The Mechanics of Mecca.”

⁴³ For a stark example of this, see the contrast in Tagliacozzo’s 2014 monograph, where his discussion of the pre-colonial hajj thoroughly incorporates the Hadrami Diaspora, yet Hadrami individuals in the rest of the work are referred to simply as “Arab”. Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*.

using the framework of movement and process geographies to understand how hajj traffic integrated individual and group interests across the Indian Ocean.

As noted, although scholars of the 19th century hajj have certainly not ignored issues with the reliance on colonial sources, many of these works have remained focused on determining and parsing the colonial approach and mindset.⁴⁴ As a result, much of the scholarship regarding pauper pilgrims and advocating the inclusion of Muslims as active agents in the hajj begins with the early 1880s.⁴⁵ Especially for scholars such as John Slight studying the British Empire, the availability of sources as well as broader historical trends play an important role in this decision. The 1880s represent the start of British attempts to document perceived issues with the pilgrimage, through annual pilgrimage reports generated by the Jeddah Consulate.⁴⁶ The British sanitation regulations which began in the 1870s are considered impactful only after 1883, while the British government also attempted to institute a form of passport system over the Indian pilgrimage around the same time.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the 1880s marks a shift in general British relations with the Ottoman Empire, following the Russo-Ottoman war in 1878 and the ‘Urabi Rebellion in Egypt in 1882. For this reason, although scholars such as Slight, Michael Low, and Eric Tagliacozzo recognize the 1870s as a decade of transition, all three focus their arguments and discussion on the hajj after 1880.

This focus on the 1880s has resulted in a lack of scholarship on the early British India Steam Navigation Company and the role of Captain Beyts’ British Consulate. Although several

⁴⁴ See John Slight’s discussion of the values of reading along the grain. Slight, “British Colonial Knowledge and the Hajj in the Age of Empire,” 84.

⁴⁵ For the most prominent example see Singha, “Passport, Ticket, and India-Rubber Stamp: ‘The Problem of the Pauper Pilgrim’ in Colonial India c. 1882-1925.”

⁴⁶ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 96.

⁴⁷ Oishi, “Friction and Rivalry over Pious Mobility: British Colonial Management of the Hajj and Reaction to It by Indian Muslims, 1870-1920,” 170.

scholars have noted the uniqueness of Captain Beyts' position, few have lingered on the topic.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, much of the scholarship ignores Beyts completely. As an extreme example, Eric Tagliacozzo's monograph on the Southeast Asian hajj includes a list of 19th century British consuls in Jeddah which marks the consulate as empty during the 1870s. Regardless, the commentary that Beyts does receive marks him as a figure of transition. Takashi Oishi suggests that he was fundamental to undermining Dutch/Ottoman pilgrimage control, while Ulrike Freitag notes that he was the only and last 'trading consul' in Jeddah for the British.⁴⁹ These roles, and the role of the 1870s as a transitional decade, suggest that Beyts' story should take a more prominent place in Indian Ocean hajj scholarship. By extension, his parent company BI and his partner Alsagoff should as well.

The chapters of this thesis will attempt to deal with these holes in the scholarship through looking at the intersections of different sets of corporate and colonial interests in Jeddah. The first chapter will focus largely on interactions between the British government and the British India Steam Navigation Company, in terms of conflict between British corporate and British colonial priorities. It will address the question of BI's involvement in the Indian Ocean hajj, and question whether or not BI should be seen as 'ending' their hajj involvement in 1878. Close analysis of BI's actions show an increasing distrust of the British government and a subsequent turn towards relying on relationships with local hajj merchants. However, while BI's transition indirectly shows the growth of Alsagoff's influence, his relationship with Beyts in consulate records reveals his power more directly. The second chapter therefore looks at Alsagoff's

⁴⁸ Oishi, "Friction and Rivalry over Pious Mobility: British Colonial Management of the Hajj and Reaction to It by Indian Muslims, 1870-1920"; Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 84-85; Freitag, "Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers?," 360.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

presence in records regarding disputes between the Beyts and Dutch consul over Javanese pilgrims, as well as British/Ottoman conflicts over pilgrimage brokers. Alsagoff appears in these letters as a very active and intentional actor who gained influence through intercolonial disputes. Then, having looked at corporate/colonial and colonial/colonial divides during the late 1870s, this thesis will turn to a corporate/corporate disagreement from 1881. Given that Alsagoff's hajj monopoly began in 1883, this chapter functions as a bridge between the context of the 1870s and the subsequent events of the 1880s. From the perspectives of BI, government conflict, and a corporate dispute, Beyts and Alsagoff's relationship becomes situation in the Indian Ocean World of the 1870s.

1.
Something More than Scandal:
The British India Steam Navigation Company and the Transportation of Pilgrims

In the margins of a note on its way from Captain Beyts to his superiors in late 1877, the Lord of Salisbury scribbled a quick question: “My own impression is that Mssr. Beyts’ proceedings are a scandal, when will he be removed?”⁵⁰ Just a few months later, a new consul was found and appointed. The fear of scandal in many ways defined Beyts’ brief tenure in the Jeddah consulate, not only because British officials in the 1870s were obsessed with the concept but also because historians have been. To be fair, the idea of scandal can serve as a simultaneously simple and powerful explanation of imperial action. For European figures in the broad colonial world of the Indian Ocean, avoiding or addressing public scandal certainly presents as a significant motivating force.⁵¹ British officials such as Lord Salisbury were not shy about promoting their fears of ‘scandal,’ and the importance of this fear to Beyts’ official position in the consulate is clear. Yet at the same time it is important to recognize that the concept of scandal is intimately and inherently tied to concern over how a situation appears. Scandal results from and is solved by *perception*, a crafted picture that does not necessarily align with contemporary experience or the forms of reality that historians aim to represent. This perambulatory warning underpins the goal of this chapter: to complicate understanding of Beyts’ ‘scandals’ and their impact on the British India Steam Navigation Company’s hajj involvement.

⁵⁰ Lord Salisbury, “Jeddah Consulate. Consular No. 5 March 28th, Consul Beyts Enclosed.” Commentary on Consulate Documents, 8 April 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

⁵¹ For an example of this trend taking center stage in scholarship, see Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*.

Scholars looking at the 19th century maritime history of the hajj tend to pass by William Mackinnon's mail steamers, and not unreasonably. As Michael Miller states, it appears that B.I. "abandon[ed] the trade in the 1870s because of scandals."⁵² The specific scandals that Miller references are similar to the ones that Lord Salisbury's quote refers to, although they occur over a year apart. Both serve as examples of the very common public spats Beyts engaged in over situations that incorporated his interests as both B.I. agent and the British consul in Jeddah. In January 1877, one of Beyts' BI steamers triggered a massive fine and drawn-out legal battle after relying on outdated pilgrimage licenses. This is the case of the *SS Medina*, which served as a turning point in BI's relationship with the British government and will be a focus of this chapter. Later, in 1878, Beyts refused to follow updated British passenger restrictions in favor of obeying Turkish ordinances, a fight which he won but which caused extraordinary tension between British officials in Jeddah and Aden.⁵³ Similar individual incidents, common through Beyts' tenure, tended to result simply in an official letter of explanation from the Jeddah consulate and the reply that Beyts' higher-ups found his rationale "satisfactory."⁵⁴ However, the accumulation of scandals and their perceived impacts on the image of the British consulate resulted in his replacement towards the end of 1878.⁵⁵ Scholarly assertions that these scandals also brought an end to BI's hajj business are consistent with internal Foreign Office memos bemoaning BI's removal of their ships from Red Sea pilgrimage traffic.⁵⁶

⁵² Miller, "Pilgrims' Progress," 201.

⁵³ Many consulate records from March and April 1878 reflect this aggression. See FO 78/2870, TNA.

⁵⁴ This occurs at least six times in the Foreign Office records for Jeddah between 1876 and 1878, in FO 78/2519 and FO 78/2649. For example, see Earl of Derby to Consul Beyts, 20 September 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

⁵⁵ Lord Salisbury to Consul Beyts, 1 November 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

⁵⁶ Earl of Derby, "Consul Beyts No. 4," 17 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

However, while Beyts' scandals clearly impacted his dismissal from public office in 1878, the consequences for B.I. are perhaps less clear-cut. In fact, this chapter will argue that B.I. did not simply stop participating in the 'business of the *hajj*' during the 1870s as academics generally accept.⁵⁷ Instead, as government restrictions increasingly conflicted with their business interests, company officials simply disassociated official steamer routes from the continuing hajj interests of local agents. As noted, BI depended on a strong relationship with the British government for a foothold in the Indian Ocean economy, a position which Beyts' scandals threatened. Consequently, BI publicly prioritized their government relationship and informed British officials that they had ended their hajj involvement in early 1877 following the incident of the SS *Medina*. Yet BI continued to reward local agents who built power in the hajj transport business. In Jeddah, BI benefitted more from Beyts' ties to Alsagoff's network than from his position in the British consulate. B.I.'s Red Sea agents increasingly relied on the support of Hadrami partnerships and distanced themselves from British bureaucracy. Thus, while scandal may have led B.I. to shift its public image, internal company decisions and actions were separate and driven by pragmatic commercial interests. Understanding this contrast requires the context of British legal changes, the details of the SS *Medina*'s scandal, and the fallout of Beyts' removal from public office.

The Native Passenger Ships Acts

BI's shifting attitude toward the hajj must first be seen in light of the changing legal relationship between the British government in India and British-registered shipping firms dealing in the hajj. The 1870s served as an important transitional decade in this regard. Following the cholera outbreak of 1865 and the British decision that some form of sanitary

⁵⁷ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 67.

intervention was necessary in pilgrimage routes, the British began implementing a series of legal frameworks known as the Native Passenger Ships Acts.⁵⁸ These acts put into writing a new and emphatic discontinuity between British commercial and colonial goals in the Indian Ocean, as the British government in India began to prioritize colonial fears of “sanitation and security” over economic benefits.⁵⁹ The first three iterations of the Native Passenger Ships Acts in 1870, 1872, and 1876 increasingly limited the number of native passengers allowed on steamships, required that ships take costly precautions against disease, and forced structural adjustments in old steamships.⁶⁰ Although most of the debates over sanitation reform were to come in the following decades, these passenger acts placed the financial interests of BI’s local Red Sea agents significantly at odds with those of the British government.⁶¹ Following the new British regulations was expensive, and according to BI they placed British merchants at a disadvantage in a competitive market full of non-British ships. M. P. MacNaughton, the company secretary at the time, explained that “the [passenger] restriction is a very absurd one, which prescribes such a limitation to a British ship while any foreign ship is at liberty to come to a British port and carry away an unlimited number of British subjects without interference.”⁶² These types of discussions are prominent in BI’s records as well as in Beyts’ Foreign Office letters from the late 1870s.

Especially following the Native Passenger Ships Act of 1876, BI’s internal correspondence reflects a drawn-out obsession with finding ways to fix or avoid new

⁵⁸ Oishi, “Friction and Rivalry over Pious Mobility: British Colonial Management of the Hajj and Reaction to It by Indian Muslims, 1870-1920.”

⁵⁹ Roff, “Sanitation and Security : The Imperial Powers and the Nineteenth Century Hajj”; Low, “Empire and the Hajj.”

⁶⁰ “The Native Passenger Ships Act, 1876,” FO 881/3606, TNA; Sconce, *Legislative Acts of the Governor-General of India in Council of 1870, with Abstracts Prefixed, Table of Contents and Index. In Continuation of Acts from 1834 to the Present Time.*

⁶¹ Mishra, *Pilgrimage, Politics, and Pestilence the Haj from the Indian Subcontinent, 1860-1920.*

⁶² M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 30 December 1875, BIS/6/21, NMM.

requirements on pilgrimage vessels.⁶³ The law forced them to actively weigh the monetary loss of complying with the acts against the benefits of staying in the favor of a government whose mail they transported and who they relied on for an economic advantage in the region.

Throughout 1876 and over the following two years, BI's board and William Mackinnon attempted to reconcile these interests, several times petitioning the Secretary of State for India on the basis that the restrictions were unfair to BI in particular.⁶⁴ As mail and cargo steamers, several of BI's Red Sea vessels were built to optimize for carrying pilgrims as a profitable edition to their usual cargo, filling the upper decks of the ship and nothing else.⁶⁵

Implementations of the new government requirements included setting structural guidelines and minimum amounts on provisions in ways that were highly disadvantageous for a ship that was carrying more than just pilgrims.⁶⁶ The BI board in London even went as far as to consider transporting pilgrims under the Portuguese flag to avoid the British restrictions, although Mackinnon ultimately rejected this tactic in fear that it would "give umbrage to the Indian government."⁶⁷ However, even in this brief consideration the conflicting interests of BI agents are prominent.

BI's extensive communication with the British government over the Native Passenger Ships Acts reveals the company's mindset and approach to these restrictions. Clearly, the matter

⁶³ Throughout BIS/6/22 – BIS/6/27. For example, see M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 29 November 1877, BIS/6/25, NMM.

⁶⁴ For examples, see: M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 30 December 1875, BIS/6/21, NMM. M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 5 September 1878, BIS/6/27, NMM.

⁶⁵ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 12 September 1878, BIS/6/27, NMM.

⁶⁶ For example, for at least a year the implementation of the act required a ship to carry three chronometers, an extremely expensive navigational device not necessary for coastal voyages. "The Native Passenger Ships Act, 1876," FO 881/3606, TNA; M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 29 November 1877, BIS/6/25, NMM.

⁶⁷ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 30 December 1875, BIS/6/21, NMM.

was extremely important to high-level officials within the company and at the London headquarters. M. P. MacNaughton routinely requested updates on the status of various challenges to the laws and made it extremely clear to William Mackinnon that finding a rational compromise with the Indian government was a high priority for the company.⁶⁸ These actions are consistent with the symbolism of Beyts' position itself. In their original recommendation of Beyts as British Consul in 1873, BI positioned themselves to benefit from the explicit union of corporate and colonial objectives in the hajj business. British sanitation efforts throughout the following years, such as the Native Passenger Acts, threatened that union. Yet for several years BI continued to attempt to stick with the original plan and compromise with the government on passenger ship restrictions. From 1875 to 1877 BI worked to overcome the increasing divide between government interests and their own in a manner conducive to BI maintaining its dealings in hajj traffic. However, the relationship and these efforts at that point were theoretical in nature, and arguments revolved around laws that were not being strongly enforced, a reality that M. P. MacNaughton explicitly notes.⁶⁹ However, this dynamic shifted in 1877 as tensions over native passenger requirements culminated in the fining and extended legal battle of the SS *Medina*.

The SS 'Medina'

The growing tensions between corporate and colonial interests, and the issues at stake for BI, are prominently showcased in the copious BI and Foreign Office records of an 1877 suit brought against the Captain of the BI steamer the SS *Medina*. The *Medina* was an old but heavily renovated steamship engaged in the Red Sea between 1874 and 1878, whose outdated

⁶⁸ See routine correspondence under the header "Medina" in BIS/6/24-26

⁶⁹ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 3 October 1873, BIS/6/17, NMM.

certification and resulting fines (assessed by the Political Resident at Aden) have been portrayed as the impetus behind BI's sudden withdrawal from the hajj.⁷⁰ From the very beginning of the decade the SS *Medina* was Beyts' ship in a sense. It was the *Medina* which Beyts took across from the Malabar coast to the Red Sea when BI first requested that he explore the possibility of doing business in Jeddah.⁷¹ The *Medina* was the vessel that Beyts asked BI to let him use on a trial basis during his first participation in the hajj traffic from Jeddah in 1875, and it was the *Medina* that BI spent large sums of money rebuilding and optimizing as a pilgrimage ship at Beyts' behest in 1875.⁷² Although other BI ships carried both cargo and passengers to and from Red Sea ports, the *Medina* was special to the company as a primarily Red Sea vessel and her early monetary successes made it clear that the company's investment – in both the ship and Captain Beyts – should have been well worth it.⁷³ However, regardless of the SS *Medina*'s promising future, new enforcement of the Native Passenger Ships Act threatened the benefits of her transporting pilgrims as a British Ship.

Despite BI's general tendency to carry pilgrims and cargo simultaneously, the SS *Medina* was licensed to carry a full load of 520 native passengers, and in January 1877 she was indeed carrying 493 Malay pilgrims with tickets from Jeddah to Singapore and Penang.⁷⁴ According to

⁷⁰ Miller, "Pilgrims' Progress," 201; Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and His Business Network, 1823-1893*, 167.

⁷¹ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 15 January 1874, BIS/6/17, NMM.

⁷² M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 18 February 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM; M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 25 February 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM; M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 6 January 1876, BIS/6/22

⁷³ The SS *Medina* was known as the SS *Sir Bartle Frere* through 1874, although for simplicity's sake I refer to her as the SS *Medina* throughout the 1870s. For financial statement of 1874: M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 4 November 1875, BIS/6/21, NMM; for evidence of renaming: M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, January 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM; For time tables showing other ships in the Red Sea until the line is temporarily shut down in 1882, see BIS/29/1

⁷⁴ "Master of the SS "Medina" Fined 1000 Rupees by Court at Aden," 26 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

J. S. Oswald, an agent in Beyts' firm, the *Medina* had not originally been slated to carry these passengers, but two of Beyts' ships had run into bad weather and become stranded, unable to reach Jeddah and collect their already-ticketed pilgrims. Without the necessary ships and facing time pressure to get the pilgrims out of Jeddah, Beyts had called on Captain Edward Russell and the *Medina*, which was in Suez at the time.⁷⁵ Beyts could not send the *Medina* to the Straits because it had upcoming BI obligations. So, the firm decided to send their 493 Malay passengers to Aden with the understanding that they would be able to find a ship going to Singapore from there. When Russell told Beyts that his pilgrimage license had expired on the 1st of January, Beyts told him all was well – in previous merchant shipping laws, the British government had allowed firms to use expired licenses, as long as they renewed them the next time they could conveniently stop in the necessary port (in this case Aden).

When the SS *Medina* entered Aden, the Political Resident at Aden brought Edward Russell to the Resident's Court and charged him with a violation of the Native Passenger Ships Act of 1870, the original version of the set of acts BI was actively griping about.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the Court sentenced Russell with a 10,000 Rupee fine, which was indeed an “enormous sum,” as Beyts describes it.⁷⁷ For context, the highest explicit penalty in the Native Passenger Ships Act

⁷⁵ Although Beyts and Oswald do not specify the cause of this time pressure, based on the discussions of the Dutch consul in chapter two it seems likely that BI would have lost the business of these pilgrims if another firm could bring a suitable steamship into port fast enough. However, it is also relevant that Beyts had problems with destitute pilgrims becoming stranded in Jeddah without food, lodging, or resources, a plight which other scholars have discussed as a great concern for Beyts. (See Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*.) It is possible that he saw the stranding of his ticketed pilgrims as causing the time pressure, or that others were pressuring him for this reason.

⁷⁶ Coastal voyages were defined as trips that never travelled more than 30 days away from the coastline. Therefore, the *Medina*, going from Jeddah to Aden, would have been subject to the original act of 1870 (covering coastal voyages) instead of the new act of 1876 (providing similar restrictions for open ocean voyages). “The Native Passenger Ships Act, 1876,” FO 881/3606, TNA

⁷⁷ In 1876, the exchange rate for the Indian Rupee (according to the BI time tables) was 21 pence (marked as 1s 9d), making this fine the equivalent of just over 875 British pounds. The exchange rate for the Singaporean or Straits Dollar was 222 Rupees per 100 Dollars. In January 1877, a similar BI ship named the SS *Pama* charged 6 Dollars per pilgrim for transport from Jeddah to the Straits Settlements. Presuming that the *Medina* was charging similar rates, the *Medina* would have lost around 6500 Rupees in passenger fees had they left Jeddah for Aden without

of 1876 was 200 Rupees (for lacking the proper certificates). The fine on the *Medina* was so abnormal because it was calculated not as a penalty for the outdated certificate (the actual charge) but for carrying more passengers than the ship's tonnage allowed, an additive per-passenger fine.⁷⁸ The Assistant Political Resident at Aden, in clear acknowledgement of the enormity of this sum of money, states his expectation that Russell "will not be left unaided to suffer the penalty" as Russell was under orders and the true culprit was the British India Steam Navigation Company.⁷⁹ Both the Resident's Court at Aden and BI saw the fine as a direct penalty against the company, as BI never suggested that Beyts' firm or Russell should pay it.

BI officials saw this fine as the result of a chain of fallacies. The Native Passenger Ships Act, Beyts argued, did not have any language regarding when and where to renew licenses – so it was rational for them to have presumed that the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 stipulations about licenses would still apply.⁸⁰ Accordingly, the license should have been valid until the steamship made its next routine business call at Aden. However, even conceding this point left BI board members and legal advisors befuddled. The number of passengers had been below the limit of the previously valid license, a paper granted by the very same authorities now handing out hefty fines for actions seemingly in accordance. BI's conclusion, as explained to William Mackinnon by the company secretary, was that the Native Passenger Ships Acts had only used the vague term 'tonnage' as the measure used to determine maximum pilgrim capacity for a

passengers, in order to renew their license (which Beyts was unwilling to do). This means that the fine on the *Medina* was almost 1.5x the ship's total gross income from passenger fares. British Consulate to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, 7 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA; G. Beyts to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, 31 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA; "1876 British India Steam Navigation Co", Time Tables 1876, BIS/29/1, NMM.

⁷⁸ A. M. Hunter, "Findings of the SS Medina," Court Record Enclosure, FO 78/2649, TNA

⁷⁹ A. M. Hunter, "Findings of the SS Medina."

⁸⁰ G. Beyts to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, 7 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

steamship. This term had two possible interpretations: gross tonnage or net tonnage.⁸¹ Since the law was not specific, the Resident at Aden had the ability to use either, arbitrarily. Thus, he could grant a license calculated from gross tonnage, giving the *Medina* 500 native passengers, but penalize the *Medina* based on her net tonnage, claiming her capacity was only 300. The Resident at Aden told Captain Russell that he had 200 more passengers than he was allowed, based on the Resident's own calculations. He charged BI 50 Rupees for each of these 200 passengers, and moreover refused to issue the *Medina* or three other unrelated BI ships new native passenger certificates.⁸² BI spent approximately the next year vehemently arguing about the fine with British officials in Aden, Bombay, and London.⁸³ They even brought in a separate legal counsel for advice on fighting the fine – all to no avail.

The fining of the *Medina* coincides with a clear transition in BI's approach in British restrictions on hajj traffic. Prior to the fine, BI's internal communications suggested an optimistic annoyance aimed at the British government in India. BI officials saw the Native Passenger Ships Act of 1876 and its predecessors as ignorant actions associated with a bureaucratic structure that did not understand the situation, but which would surely adjust course when given appropriate feedback. BI also seems to have been convinced that the government would not actually punish companies for breaking these laws, when push came to shove. This belief manifests fairly explicitly in an 1876 letter regarding another BI vessel engaged in the Red Sea, the SS *Vaingorla*. The company secretary specifically instructs William Mackinnon that concerns over

⁸¹ Gross tonnage refers to a ship's total carrying capacity, including engines, crew, etc. Net tonnage refers only to the ship's available cargo space. M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 31 May 1878, BIS/6/26, NMM.

⁸² A. M. Hunter, "Findings of the SS *Medina*," Court Record Enclosure, FO 78/2649, TNA

⁸³ See BIS/1/3, NMM. BI board notes from meetings in Glasgow and London continue referencing efforts against the fine, as well as citing the opinions of outside council.

her certificates and tonnage should not be acted upon, because it did not appear that the British were enforcing their pilgrimage laws.⁸⁴ The fining of the *Medina* proved BI's beliefs wrong and preceded a drastic change in the company's approach to the government's hajj intervention. Among other shifts, BI's correspondence referring to the government transitions from using neutral and matter-of-fact language to insinuating malicious intentions against the government and its officials. BI's board appears convinced that the fine against the *Medina* was in fact a punishment enacted against the company for actions unrelated to the court case itself, although the company officials do not seem to know exactly what they are being punished for, as several possibilities are suggested as relevant.

The British Foreign Office was aware of BI's indignation over the fine. In fact, several British officials in Beyts' chain of command in London agreed that they could not see "the justice in the decision."⁸⁵ Regardless, they insisted that they had no control over the Board of Trade and Resident at Aden's actions.⁸⁶ BI apparently considered this incorrect, as they continued petitioning individuals such as the Secretary of State for India at least through February 1878. However, BI also responded in non-bureaucratic ways. In late March 1877, Mackinnon removed the *Medina* from the Red Sea, repurposing her to run on the Bombay/Kurachee line. The Foreign Office interpreted this act as retribution against the British government and an end to BI's hajj involvement. In a short note written in March 1877, the Lord of Derby expressed regret over BI's retaliation:

Inasmuch as in consequence of what the British India Company conceive to be a harsh decision on the part of the Aden Authorities they have withdrawn the "Medina" from the Red Sea traffic, and we shall now lose the principal means we have hitherto had of obtaining information as to what was going on in the Red Sea. The traffic will

⁸⁴ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 16 July 1874, BIS/6/17, NMM.

⁸⁵ "Master of the SS "Medina" Fined 1000 Rupees by Court at Aden," 26 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

⁸⁶ Earl of Derby, "Consul Beyts No. 4," 17 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

henceforward be confined to the Khedive's vessels who will have everything their own way. I think Captain Beyts should be told that the question of the fine imposed by the Authorities at Aden on the "Medina" for carrying passengers after the license had expired is one which this department cannot deal with and that it must be left for the decision of the Indian Authorities in conjunction properly with the Board of Trade.⁸⁷

This letter poses some conundrums for understanding BI's position in the hajj and its actions over the following two years. While the SS *Medina* was, as previously explained, a unique ship that BI had tailored specifically for the hajj, she certainly was not the only BI ship involved in the business, nor the largest. Her removal from the Red Sea did not end BI's involvement in the hajj, and as late as March 1878, Beyts claims that his firm transports more than two thirds of all hajj traffic through Jeddah.⁸⁸ For two years following the fining of the *Medina*, consulate records show continued complaints from British officials in Aden and elsewhere regarding Beyts and BI's efforts to transport pilgrims.⁸⁹ The company clearly did not follow through on the implied threat to stop transporting pilgrims altogether, whether via the *Medina* or other vessels.

Although Lord Derby's stated fear of an Ottoman-run hajj transport in the 1870s clearly did not come to pass, his memo suggests an awareness that the government's relationship with BI was changing. Just as BI shifted to approach the government with a skeptical and antagonistic lens, the government also viewed BI as intentionally harming their specific interests. Regardless of any specific deal or sharing of hajj information, the note clearly delineates the Earl of Derby's view that BI was working against his government. It also clearly attributes a motive to BI, framing their actions in the Red Sea as a direct reaction to perceiving government antagonism. So, while it appears strictly speaking true that Beyts' scandals impacted the company's Red Sea

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ G. Beyts & Co to H. B. M's Consul, 20 March 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

⁸⁹ See consulate records throughout FO 78/2870 and FO 78/3017. For a specific example, see G. Beyts to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, 28 March 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

approach, the inconsistency and unreliability of the British government seem much more central to BI's motivations and concerns than fear of poor image from the scandals themselves. In this sense, the government presents as unstable and therefore detrimental to the interests of BI as a close partner. However, the British government was not BI agents' only resource for support in hajj endeavors.

BI and Hadrami Merchants

The destabilizing impact of the British government on local British shipping agents dealing in the hajj appears to have been countered by the stabilizing influence of the Hadrami presence in Jeddah. While the Hadrami presence permeated many major ports of the Red Sea and around the Indian Ocean, the 1870s saw the rise of Singapore as a major maritime transport and hajj hub, especially for four Hadrami families based in Singapore but closely connected across the Indian Ocean and in the Hejaz.⁹⁰ Starting likely around 1875, Beyts' firm specifically began forming a very close relationship with a Hadrami individual known as Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff, and his shipping firm the Singapore Steamship Company. While the exact nature of the partnership remains unclear, other shipping agents in Jeddah clearly saw them as extremely close.⁹¹ Indeed, in a letter directed at Beyts' superiors in the British government, Beyts' managing agent J.S. Oswald defends the integrity of their firm by claiming that "we possesses only the influence of the Singapore Co agents who have been years in the trade, and our own reputations, and yet we can secure pilgrims [when others cannot]."⁹² This letter postdates the conflict over the *Medina*, and clearly supports the claim not only that Beyts

⁹⁰ Jonge and Kaptein, *Transcending Borders*, 118–19.

⁹¹ See discussions in chapter two. For example, M. Hauegraaff, Netherlands Consul, to A. B. Wylde, 17 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

⁹² James S. Oswald to the Right Honorable Earl of Derby, 20 May 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

continued dealing in the hajj but also that he relied on the reputation and expertise of the Alsagoff family in order to gain the trust and win the business of native passengers going between Jeddah and Singapore. The exact nature of the relationship between Beyts and the Singapore Steamship Company will serve as a central focus of later chapters. The question here remains one of outcome, and the role the Hadrami network may have played in shaping BI's involvement in the hajj following the *Medina* fine and their disillusionment with government hajj regulations.

In 1878, the British government replaced Beyts in the British consulate, and a key source of archival information about his business dealings and his involvement in the Hadrami network hajj disappears with the loss of consulate records. Although some scattered references to Beyts as a local agent exist in the consulate letters of his successors, these references only serve to confirm that Beyts remained in Jeddah as a local steamship business agent through at least the end of the 19th century.⁹³ This knowledge is also supported through BI's time tables, which list Wylde, Beyts & Co (Beyts' firm) as their Jeddah agent through 1888, and G. Beyts himself as the agent in Suez, at least through 1899.⁹⁴ At a minimum, it is clear that Beyts was valuable to BI for more than simply his position in the consulate, especially since there is no discussion of looking to replace him in BI records until a brief internal financial debacle in the late 1880s.⁹⁵ Additionally, analysis of two more aspects of this story shed important light on the relationship between BI and hajj business moving into the 1880s. The first of these are details regarding

⁹³ See Consul Zohrab's commentary on Wylde, Beyts & Co throughout FO 78/3017, TNA.

⁹⁴ BIS/29/1, NMM.

⁹⁵ "Agencies at Jeddah and Suakin," 28 January 1886, BIS/1/4, NMM.

Beyts' removal from the consulate, while the second is the story of a key individual named J.S. Oswald, previously mentioned as Beyts' representative during the *Medina* hearing.

Beyts' removal from public office should be seen from two viewpoints – one being the government's replacement of him as the consul, but the other being his partner and vice-consul's simultaneous resignation. A. B. Wylde was also a BI agent in Jeddah, and Beyts' partner in their firm, Wylde, Beyts & Co. In 1876, Beyts exerted extreme efforts to place Wylde as his Vice-Consul and to gain recognition of this position from the Ottoman government.⁹⁶ Wylde's resignation preceded Beyts' removal (although not by much time), and his resignation letter itself outlines a clear rationale for why a Trading Consul in Jeddah is inherently dysfunctional. He explicitly explains to Lord Derby that “The large British Christian and British Mohammedan interests at this port at present, no Trading Consul can do justice to. . . the present mercantile interests of the consulate must clash with those of the Turkish Government and others engaged in commerce.”⁹⁷ Wylde's rationale is repeated almost word-for-word in the letter relieving Beyts of his post.⁹⁸ This perspective suggests that, although Beyts himself was replaced by the government, BI agents instigated the separation of consulate and BI interests.

Wylde's letter also contains language that suggests focused attention to the idea of reputation. Although Wylde frames this to Lord Derby as concern over the reputation of the consulate, the firm's comments regarding the important reputation of Syed Alsagoff paired with their own reputation suggest that the partners saw a contrast in the reputation of Wylde, Beyts &

⁹⁶ Among many other examples in FO 78/2519, see G. Beyts to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, 20 January 1876, FO 78/2519, TNA.

⁹⁷ A. B. Wylde, British Vice Consul, Jeddah, to The Right Honorable Lord Derby, H. M.'s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 29 January 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

⁹⁸ Lord Salisbury, “Draft Consul Beyts No. 14,” 1 November 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

Co and Alsagoff's firm.⁹⁹ Separation of consular and corporate interests may have been intended to improve the reputation of Beyts' firm in Jeddah. This framing of the consular transition suggests that Wylde and Beyts were prioritizing their local business connections with the Hadrami network over their government interests. While these actions do not seem to result from BI instruction, they certainly align well with BI's transitioning attitude toward the British government. When government hajj interests became clearly detrimental to BI's hajj interests, the company's agents prioritized their relationship with the Singapore Steamship Company and remained very much relevant in the business of the hajj.

This interpretation of the BI narrative gains support from the brief archival references to one of Beyts' subsidiary agents, J. S. Oswald. Interestingly enough, Oswald appears momentarily in existing scholarship of the hajj due to his role in running the 1880s hajj monopoly that developed between Singapore and Jeddah.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the 1870s and until 1881, Oswald served as an agent for Beyts' firm, and thus as a representative of BI.¹⁰¹ Although he appears to part ways with Beyts, Oswald appears again in BI internal correspondence in 1886 when he requests the position of BI agent in Suakin and Jeddah. Given that Oswald is known to have been part of the 1880s Hadrami monopoly during this decade, it is extremely relevant that Suakin was a major Hadrami port on the Red Sea, where the Alsagoff held significant influence and familial ties.¹⁰² Although for unclear reasons BI retained Beyts in Jeddah after agreeing to remove him, they looked favorably on Oswald's request, and Oswald became the official BI

⁹⁹ James S. Oswald to the Right Honorable Earl of Derby, 20 May 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁰⁰ Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia*, 101.

¹⁰¹ "J. S. Oswald examined" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁰² Jonge and Kaptein, *Transcending Borders*, 116; Freitag and Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*.

agent in Suakin 1886. In contrast, when the British government asked Oswald to become Beyts' successor in the consulate in 1878, he quickly refused.¹⁰³ Oswald clearly gained his prominence and business success through making use of Beyts' firm's connections to Alsagoff and the Hadrami network. BI's quick acceptance of Oswald as a company agent and their favorable language toward him both suggest an appreciation that local agents in the Red Sea would by necessity be involved in hajj traffic.¹⁰⁴

The Hadrami network's involvement with local BI agents made these agents stable and successful, such as with both J. S. Oswald and Beyts himself. BI's willingness to add ports of business and additional agents in the Red Sea who were publicly working with Alsagoff suggests an implicit understanding that being tied to this Arab network was stable, consistent and trustworthy from a business perspective.¹⁰⁵ These actions stand directly in contrast to BI's general business model, through which they gained strength and advantage through government contracts and paired corporate-colonial interests. However, when it came to the hajj and the Red Sea this practice had backfired. So, while BI as a company perhaps seems to have publicly withdrawn from the hajj, their active separation from government interests and continued support of shipping agents working within the Hadrami network points to a different conclusion.

Scholarship thus far has retained the government's version of the BI/hajj story – that without the colonial support and an official position in the British Consulate, BI's business in the hajj was unsuccessful. Yet, BI company narratives suggest that that it was the government itself which was destabilizing to their hajj interests, and that siding with local Arab power was in fact a

¹⁰³ "Consul Beyts No. 9," 1 June 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

¹⁰⁴ "Agencies at Jeddah and Suakin," 28 January 1886, BIS/1/4, NMM.

¹⁰⁵ Oswald's connection to Alsagoff was clearly public knowledge, as reference to his role in the monopoly appears in government records despite the fact that Oswald did not have a position in the British government.

better pragmatic business investment. In this way, the British government's understanding of the hajj in 1878 appears as a result of intentional manipulation. BI benefitted from the government having misinformation, or in colonial knowledge being incomplete. In this way, not only did their priorities align with local power, but their role in colonial archives appears similar as well. BI company priorities followed and benefitted from those of local power in Jeddah.

2.
Local Understanding of Intercolonial Conflict:
Alsagoff as an Active Participant in Colonial Rivalries

Just two years before Beyts arrived in the Red Sea, another entrepreneurial businessman entered the hajj transport market with his eye on the sea route between Singapore and Jeddah. He was young – when he and his uncle registered the Singapore Steamship Company in 1872 he was only twenty years old – and he was Arab, part of the vibrant Hadrami community living in Singapore.¹⁰⁶ Although his father and grandfather had also organized hajj transport from Singapore, he refused to simply follow the path laid out by his predecessors, who had relied on the same traditional sailing vessels and monsoon winds as many generations before them.¹⁰⁷ Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff would own and operate the very first steamship and steamship company registered out of British Singapore.¹⁰⁸ His business prowess would grow over the course of the 1870s, ultimately culminating in his coordination of a complex monopoly over hajj traffic in the 1880s.¹⁰⁹ Eventually, he would be known as one of the most powerful men in the hajj industry.¹¹⁰ Yet in the early 1870s he was new and aspiring, just starting to forge his own path and carve his own influence. It was this man, growing in significance but still young and inexperienced, who Beyts began partnering with when the British consulate opened in 1874.

¹⁰⁶ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography”; Othman, “The Arabs Migration and Its Importance in the Historical Development of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Malaya.”

¹⁰⁷ Roff, “Murder as an Aid to Social History,” 92.

¹⁰⁸ Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora*, 26. Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” 122.

¹⁰⁹ Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia*, 101.

¹¹⁰ Low, “The Mechanics of Mecca,” 319; Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora*, 150–51.

Alsagoff's successful business ventures and his interactions with colonial European agents in the Indian Ocean hajj clearly counter historiographies of colonial dominance over locally driven trade networks.¹¹¹ While as an individual he has not escaped scholarship on the hajj, Hadrami trade, or the Indian Ocean, each of these academic perspectives provides a distinct, and occasionally contradictory, account of his legacy and importance.¹¹² In addition, since much of the existing scholarship focuses on the 1880s and 1890s, gaps exist in academic understandings of Alsagoff's rise and early business ventures. Fortunately, Alsagoff's partnership and relationship with Beyts has left breadcrumbs in the archives. Colonial correspondents discussed and enclosed copies of letters from Alsagoff's interactions with Beyts and the Dutch consul, as well as from discussions of imprisonment of Alsagoff's brokers, in Jeddah during 1876-7. Viewing Alsagoff in these sources as a key member of the Hadrami merchant network in Jeddah provides a unique opportunity to reframe and analyze how wealthy and powerful local merchants navigated the colonial framework. This chapter will argue that Seyd Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff understood intercolonial relations and power dynamics and intentionally used enmity between colonial governments and their representatives to increase the prestige and profitability of his own hajj business. However, the fact that Alsagoff appears in these archives is due to his apparently close partnership with Captain George Beyts, a situation which requires attention first.

¹¹¹ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 318.

¹¹² For example, contrast Slight's assertion that Alsagoff lost influence after the incident of the SS *Jeddah* in 1881 against scholarship on his 1883 monopoly. Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 98–99; Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 316–18.

Alsagoff and Beyts as Partners

It seems logical that Alsagoff and Beyts would have formed a mutually beneficial business relationship when the British consulate opened in Jeddah in 1874. Beyts, having captained ships on the Malabar coast for most of his career, was new to the large-scale organizational and bureaucratic work involved in hajji transport and merchant shipping.¹¹³ BI selected him for Jeddah due to his experience working with locals in India and the long list of languages he spoke.¹¹⁴ Yet, while he was a seasoned captain who BI leadership in London clearly trusted as a regional expert, Beyts was a newcomer to a business and city with deeply entrenched dynamics and complex internal politics.¹¹⁵ The young upstart Alsagoff had grown up in this business; he had connections all around the Red Sea, an intricate understanding of the hajj, and a family name that local pilgrimage brokers respected.¹¹⁶ The seasoned Captain Beyts, on the other hand, had access to European capital, power over BI steamships and crew, and the authority of the British crown behind him.¹¹⁷ In addition, Beyts' time on the Malabar Coast may have exposed him to the Hadrami diaspora, making him more inclined to trust other members of

¹¹³ Moore, "Jeddah Consulate.-- Captain Beyts."

¹¹⁴ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 18 February 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM.

¹¹⁵ BI gave Beyts an abnormal amount of decision power over the shape of BI business in the Red Sea when the company originally expanded there. Freitag, "The City and the Stranger: Jeddah in the Nineteenth Century," 218–19. For more general Red Sea context, see M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 15 January 1874, BIS/6/17, NMM; M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 18 February 1875, BIS/6/20, NMM.

¹¹⁶ Roff, "Murder as an Aid to Social History," 92; Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography," 113–17.

¹¹⁷ Beyts had enough resources at his disposal that he could usually find funding for his various projects. For example, in 1875 Beyts requested funding from the British government to build more docks and equipment to deal with steamships in Jeddah's harbor. When the government refused, he turned to BI which provided him with the requested funds and labor. "Barges for Capt Beyts," *Directors' minute book from British India Steam Navigation Company Ltd Mar 1870-Nov 1879*, 344, BIS/1/3, NMM.

the ethnic mercantile network when he arrived in Jeddah.¹¹⁸ The strengths and capabilities of these two businessmen certainly complemented each other.

The relationship between Beyts and Alsagoff subtly permeates many aspects of the consulate records from Jeddah in the 1870s. In the previously discussed scandal of the SS *Medina*, court and consular records specific to the case mention only the British India Steam Navigation Company and its agents, including Beyts and Oswald. Yet, in the days leading up to the *Medina*'s departure from Jeddah to Aden, a letter from A. B. Wylde to the Dutch consulate clearly references the "pilgrims engaged by Mahamed Sayed Saigoff," who are leaving Jeddah via the SS *Medina* since "the agents of the British India Company have put the SS "Medina" at his disposal."¹¹⁹ In a short Arabic message forwarded from Alsagoff to Beyts on the same day, Alsagoff reassures one of the Sheiks who deals with pilgrims directly, instructing him to "make the pilgrims understand that they will not be landed in Aden and suffer any delay but that (Inshallah) if God please immediately after their arrival they will be transhipped from the SS "Medina" to another steamship."¹²⁰ However, as BI fought the legal battle of the SS *Medina*'s scandal, no mention was made of the Singapore Steamship Company or Alsagoff's involvement in coordinating her passengers. In official British court records, he is left out of the conversation by individuals who clearly would have understood his role, such as J. S. Oswald. In BI correspondence over the *Medina*, company managers suggest that the "impropriety" of Beyts' association with Singapore is responsible for the fine, although they do not mention Alsagoff by

¹¹⁸ Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," 215.

¹¹⁹ A. B. Wylde to M. Hauegraaff, Consul to H. M. King of the Netherlands, Jeddah, 22 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹²⁰ A translation from the consulate translator is provided within the consulate record. Said Mohd bin Omer El Sagoff to Sheik Sadik Muslim, 23 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

name.¹²¹ Regardless, Alsagoff's direct involvement in the organization of the SS *Medina*, along with many other BI ships during these years, peaks through the consular record.

Although this type of evidence suggests that Beyts and Alsagoff may have had a close partnership, the exact nature of the relationship between the two men and their corresponding firms remains debatable. In letters from Beyts as consul to officials in the hierarchy of the British government, Beyts himself describes the association in varying vague terms and tends to avoid mentioning Alsagoff altogether, even in instances where other documents make it clear that Alsagoff and his firm were involved.¹²² However, despite Beyts' personal reluctance to 'label the relationship', letters from Beyts' business partners, including A. B. Wylde (Beyts' Vice Consul and Beyts & Co agent) and J. S. Oswald (Beyts & Co's managing agent) often provide more concrete references to Alsagoff. For example, J. S. Oswald includes a detailed depiction in a letter regarding details about a specific chartered vessel named the SS *Patna*:

This vessel was chartered by us, for Sayd Mahomed al Sagoff, the resident agent for the Singapore Company. We are associated with their agent in Singapore, and for 3 years have worked in complete harmony with the agent here, we have had frequent partnership transactions in the charter of vessels to the Straits [. . .] we chartered her because we do all such work for Sayd Sagoff.¹²³

This description aligns well with Beyts' comments, which usually simply state that the firm of Beyts' and Co has chartered a vessel "in consultation with" Alsagoff or include his firm as a commercial partner.¹²⁴ However, letters from the Dutch Consul use stronger language, tending to

¹²¹ M. P. McNaughton to Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co, 22 March 1877, BIS/6/24, NMM.

¹²² The Dutch Consul plainly states that the SS *Medina* was being chartered for Alsagoff when it was detained in Aden in January 1877. Netherlands Consul M. Hauesgraaff to H B M's Consul G Beyts, 16 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA; Said Moh'd bin Omar el Sagoff to Sheik Sadik Muslim, 23 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹²³ This letter was probably written by Oswald in order to distinguish that this was correspondence from a mercantile firm to the government, avoiding the conflict of interest inherent in Beyts' position.

¹²⁴ Beyts and Co to The British Consul, Jeddah, 19 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA; H. B. M's Vice Consul to the Honorable Earl of Derby, 3 March 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

refer to Beyts and Alsagoff as representing the same businesses and interests. He directly calls Alsagoff “the partner of the firm Messrs Beyts & Co at [Jeddah].”¹²⁵ On the flip side, at one point he even plainly states that A. B. Wylde was serving as an agent for Alsagoff’s Singapore Steamship Company.¹²⁶ Regardless of the exact arrangements between firms, it seems quite clear that Alsagoff relied on Beyts’ firm to charter and access steamships while Beyts relied on Alsagoff’s name and connections to fill BI ships with Javanese pilgrims. As with the Dutch Consul, other merchants in Jeddah knew that Beyts and Alsagoff were watching out for each other’s interests and businesses, out of mutual benefit. As J. S. Oswald so eloquently phrases it: “We possess only the influence of the Singapore Co agents who have been years in the trade, and our own reputations and yet we can secure pilgrims when [the Dutch Consul’s] official position and pressure fails him.”¹²⁷ This explicit contrast between the hajj business of the Dutch Consul and the Beyts/Alsagoff partnership serves as context for several intercolonial conflicts regarding the hajj in early 1877.

Conflict with the Dutch Consul

In the 1870s, both the British and Dutch consulates hosted a ‘trading consul’ who ran shipping companies while representing their respective governments in Jeddah. However, while the Dutch made use of this strategy intentionally and for most of the 19th century, Beyts was the first (and subsequently the only) British consul in Jeddah to simultaneously manage his own shipping interests.¹²⁸ Unlike the Dutch, the British officials dealing with Beyts expressed distress

¹²⁵ M. Hauegraaff, Consul to the King of the Netherlands, to G. Beyts, H. B. M.’s Consul, Jeddah, 28 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹²⁶ M. Hauegraaff, Netherlands Consul, to A. B. Wylde, 17 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹²⁷ James S. Oswald to the Right Honorable Earl of Derby, 20 May 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹²⁸ Freitag, “Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers?,” 360.

that Beyts “identifie[d] himself so much with the company that it is very difficult to see where the consul ends and the trade begins.”¹²⁹ Regardless, until Beyts’ replacement in 1878, both consuls managed steamships that carried pilgrims between Southeast Asia and Jeddah, putting the two consuls in direct competition over the highly profitable business of hajj transport. During Beyts’ tenure, the Dutch Consul was a man named M. Hauegraaff, although small comments in the consulate correspondence suggest that Beyts and Wylde actually corresponded with his Vice Consul and business partner, a Mr. Van der Chijs, because M. Hauegraaf did not handle his own English correspondence.¹³⁰ A set of documents resulting from related trade disputes and aggression between the Dutch and British consulates in early 1877 represent the majority of the Foreign Office records containing direct references to Alsagoff during Beyts’ time as consul.

Most of this conflict centers around the Dutch Consul’s handling of passports for Javanese pilgrims. In the later part of the 19th century, the British government was unique in not issuing a passport system for Muslims in their domains who wished to complete the hajj.¹³¹ For local Muslims living in Dutch territory, valid passports and passage tickets were required to venture through from Red Sea ports to Mecca and Medina. In a city such as Jeddah, Muslims travelling across the Red Sea ended the seaborne part of their journeys and joined groups of pilgrims organized by various types of pilgrimage brokers, often simply referred to as sheikhs in official British correspondence.¹³² For Javanese pilgrims, Dutch regulations required that the pilgrims obtain pilgrimage passports in the Dutch East Indies and leave them in the custody of

¹²⁹ V. D., “Reporting Dutch Consul at Jeddah Refusing Passports to Javanese Pilgrims engaged by B. I. S. N. Co’s Steamer for Singapore,” 26 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹³⁰ A. B. Wylde to G. Beyts, H. B. M.’s Consul, Jeddah, 3 March 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹³¹ Singha, “Passport, Ticket, and India-Rubber Stamp: ‘The Problem of the Pauper Pilgrim’ in Colonial India c. 1882-1925.”

¹³² Singha. For the comment on terminology see communication about the imprisonment of pilgrim brokers, throughout FO 78/2649

the Dutch Consulate in Jeddah while they completed the hajj. Upon their return to Jeddah, the pilgrims were required to collect their passports from the Dutch consulate before they could board a steamship back home.¹³³ The consul had the power to refuse if he felt the ship was not well equipped or if he was concerned that the pilgrims were being manipulated in some way. In the late 1870s, the Dutch consul frequently refused to release Javanese passports, citing reasons such as concern that the steamship they were booked on was not headed to its stated destination.¹³⁴ For example, in February of 1877 the Dutch consul cited the proceedings of the *SS Medina* and refused passports on the grounds that Beyts and Alsagoff could not be trusted to transship pilgrims all the way through to their destinations.¹³⁵

Many letters from Beyts' firm decry the Dutch tendency to withhold passports, maintaining that the consul used his control over passports to put "every obstacle in the way of fair and legitimate commerce."¹³⁶ Although these complaints were common and not necessarily unexpected, the complaints and letters from different instances of conflict reveal subtleties in the relationship between Dutch, British, and Hadrami merchants such as Alsagoff. One useful example involves the *SS Patna*, a steamship owned by BI that was simultaneously under a BI mail contract and being used by Beyts to carry pilgrims for Alsagoff's firm. The ship became a subject of contention after the Dutch consul refused to release the passports of the pilgrims booked to leave on it. The Dutch consul claimed that the issue was one of timing. He could not release or prepare the passports until the ship was physically in the harbor at Jeddah. As a mail steamer, the *SS Patna* was not spending time at Jeddah, and was only scheduled to spend 24

¹³³ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 97.

¹³⁴ M. Hausgraaff to G. Beyts, HBM's consul, Jeddah, 16 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ A. B. Wylde, HBM's Vice Consul, Jeddah, to G. Beyts, HBM's Consul, Jeddah, 3 March 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

hours picking up pilgrims that had already bought tickets through Alsagoff. The Dutch consul did not produce the passports in that 24-hour window. Unlike other steamers, however, which usually stayed in the harbor and had to wait for the Dutch consulate to produce the passports, the SS *Patna* was on a BI mail route and Beyts was forced to send her on to her next destination with only mail, absent the approximately 900 pilgrims who already held tickets in Jeddah.¹³⁷ These pilgrims, of course, were now waiting with few-to-no resources for survival in Jeddah, joining a group frequently referred to in scholarship as the “destitute pilgrims” of Jeddah.¹³⁸ It did not escape British notice that this made them available and desperate passengers for one of the steamships owned and operated by the Dutch consul’s firm, the SS *Woodburn*, which was empty and sitting in Jeddah’s harbor.¹³⁹ Perhaps in somewhat of a panic, Alsagoff chartered another company’s steamer to carry the pilgrims he had booked, at a substantial loss.¹⁴⁰ Beyts launched an official complaint against the Dutch Consulate with the British government and Earl Derby, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Unfortunately for Beyts, the British government officials he complained to seemed to have considered the Dutch Consul’s acts predictable and within his rights. In response to Beyts’ long collection of enclosed letters regarding the SS *Patna*, the Earl of Derby writes that the “complaint looks like a case of tit-for-tat.”¹⁴¹ To British officials, the situation Beyts describes as egregious seemed like a normal business spat and certainly not a reason for government action or

¹³⁷ A. B. Wylde to His Excellency the Governor General of the Hedjas, 30 December 1876, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹³⁸ It should be noted that this term usually refers to Indian pilgrims in the 1870s and 1880s. Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 84.

¹³⁹ Beyts & Co to HBM’s Consul, Jeddah, 28 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁴⁰ The steamship was the SS *Columbian*, owned by P&O. By Alsagoff chartering a new steamer instead of Beyts, it appears that the two partners (BI and the Singapore Steamship Co) effectively split the losses from the SS *Patna* leaving without her passenger cargo.

¹⁴¹ “Reporting Dutch Consul at Jeddah Refusing Passports.”

interference. However, part of this perspective seems to rest on a fundamental lack of British understanding of the workings of the hajj and hajj traffic from Singapore specifically. At the end of his notes on Beyts' complaint, the Earl of Derby writes:

I do not see how we can complain of the Dutch Consul having refused passports to Dutch subjects whatever his motive may have been, nor do I understand why "the complaint" company should have lost money to him doing so. I presume pilgrims like . . . other passengers pay for their tickets when they take them, & if their own consul prevents them going I don't see why the company whose tickets they possess should refund the money. It becomes a matter between the pilgrims and their consul rather than between the two consulates.¹⁴²

The comment goes on to insinuate that if a pilgrim is stupid enough to pay for a return ticket to Singapore before gaining access to a passport, then it would be their own fault if they end up unable to leave.¹⁴³ Of the several issues with the Earl of Derby's response, the most telling is his clear misunderstanding of the steamship hajj from Singapore and the importance of Promissory Notes.

Much of the existing scholarship on Alsagoff and Hadrami involvement in the hajj from Singapore discusses the concept of a hajj 'debt-slavery' system.¹⁴⁴ In essence, many of the Javanese pilgrims who ended up in Jeddah following their pilgrimage had no resources with which to pay for a return ticket to Singapore. This phenomenon has received attention in scholarship of Indian pilgrims, who generated a "destitute pilgrims" crisis in Jeddah that the British government became obsessed with in the 1880s.¹⁴⁵ However, a similar crisis for Javanese pilgrims did not exist because under Alsagoff's hajj system they could return to Singapore with a

¹⁴² "Reporting Dutch Consul at Jeddah Refusing Passports."

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 95–96; Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca*, 73; Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 319; Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora*, 26; Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914.*, 166–68; Clarence-Smith, "Hadrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay World," 312; Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography," 126.

¹⁴⁵ Slight, *The British Empire and the Hajj*, 84–101.

Promissory Note that would require them to either pay the ticket price directly upon their return or work it off with labor on one of Alsagoff's plantations in Singapore.¹⁴⁶ In other words, when the Earl of Derby presumes that "passengers pay for their tickets when they take them," he is incorrect. The setup of Alsagoff's debt system made his ships (and therefore BI ships) especially vulnerable to manipulation by the Dutch Consulate in ways that the British government failed to recognize.

During the several months following the incidents of the *SS Patna* as well as the trial of the *SS Medina*, Beyts continued to send his British higher-ups evidence of the Dutch Consul's alleged wrongdoings. Over the course of several sets of enclosures sent to London, references to Alsagoff become more prominent, until eventually Beyts begins sending letters written and signed by Alsagoff himself. While most of the letters Beyts writes and encloses follow similar themes to those discussed in the story of the *SS Patna*, simply decrying the actions of the Dutch consul as negative to British trade, Alsagoff's longest letter from the end of February 1877 stands out for its frankness and clear objectives. In this letter to the British consulate, forwarded by Beyts to his superiors in later enclosures, Alsagoff explains the history of his frustrations with the Dutch:

I beg to say that [the Dutch consul] acts illegally in engaging in trade and that he uses all his influence to ruin my name and position with the pilgrims — I further say that I was in the habit of paying him large sums of money annually so that he might not detain the pilgrims' passports and he then used to send the passports to me — as soon as a British Consulate was established in Jeddah, I was determined to stand on my rights and declined to pay him for what he was in duty bound to do and since then I have endless trouble with the pilgrims engaged to my steamers in getting their passports — while he sends other passports to all the pilgrims engaged to his steamers — I hereby protest against these acts of the Consul of the Netherlands and hold him responsible for all damages and losses which I may incur.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 317.

¹⁴⁷ Seyd Mohd O Alsagoff, Agent for the Singapore Steam Ship Company Ltd to H B M's Consul, Jeddah, 20 February 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

Alsagoff presents a tale of great woe, pitting his champion the British government against his enemy, the corrupt Dutch consul. His letter draws on themes that would be near and dear to a British official's pride, saying that he trusted the British to help him uphold his rights and in essence fight to end corruption on the Indian Ocean. In this narrative, the British are the figurative knights on white horses, riding into Jeddah to protect true and ethical liberal economics and 'save' the native peoples from the immorality and greed of other colonial empires. Alsagoff paints corruption in very concrete terms, claiming that he was forced to pay actual bribes in exchange for services that he was entitled to as a British subject. This image of corruption contrasts against the earlier narrative that Beyts provides to his superiors, which requires the presumption that the Dutch Consul is lying about protecting his pilgrims. Beyts' enclosures and complaints left him open to the given reply that "It is possible that the Dutch Consul was not pretending anxiety for the Dutch pilgrims."¹⁴⁸ Alsagoff takes a different approach, providing a new narrative less easy to dismiss or counter. In the story he presents, a British official might have a difficult time refusing help, risking the liberal ideologies he would claim to stand for.

Of course, other aspects of this letter make clear that Alsagoff's story is a very intentional spin. For example, he makes it seem as if he had been forced to abide by Dutch corruption for many years, "annually" paying off the consul for the release of passports until at long last a British consulate was established. However, the timeline does not particularly support that implicit suggestion. As stated earlier, Alsagoff himself entered the hajj business very close to when Beyts arrived in Jeddah. He and his uncle started the Singapore Steamship Company in

¹⁴⁸ "Reporting Dutch Consul at Jeddah Refusing Passports."

1872 and began working with Beyts immediately when Beyts arrived in 1874.¹⁴⁹ When Beyts arrived the consulate had only been closed for three years, meaning that even if Alsagoff were referring to his father's somewhat more limited dealings in the hajj, he still would only have had only a brief time with no British consulate in Jeddah.¹⁵⁰ The point of nitpicking the timeline, of course, is to say that Alsagoff had a clear objective. His letter framed his basic narrative in a way that would portray him as an honest native merchant relying on the British to counter the negative impact of other, less ethical, colonial empires. Alsagoff at this point in time has not been dealing in the hajj terribly long, yet he paints himself as a long-standing native merchant who was routinely swindled and yet trusted the British specifically to save him. This portrayal suggests that Alsagoff understood the British colonial perspective on locals and used this perspective to advance his goal of undermining the Dutch consulate's control over passports.

Alsagoff's plainly stated goal remains the enabling of his business and an end to Dutch withholding of passports. Yet he approaches that goal by attempting to call on and use to his advantage British colonial pride and the relationship between colonial powers in Jeddah. Not only did Alsagoff understand these dynamics, he intentionally used them to advance his business. It would be additionally negligent to not recognize the clear contrast Alsagoff sets up between his own business, which relies on his reputation for honesty and reliability, and the presented corruption of the Dutch. Alsagoff positioned himself at the intersection of empires and used that positioning to play colonial officials off each other. Although the archives do not specifically indicate whether or not Alsagoff's letters through the British consulate succeeded in this instance, he did ultimately fix his problem with the Dutch. The next chapter will discuss a

¹⁴⁹ Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography." James S. Oswald to the Right Honorable Earl of Derby, 20 May 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁵⁰ Freitag, "Helpless Representatives of the Great Powers?," 360.

court case from 1881 which shows Alsagoff partnering with P. N. Van der Chijs, the Dutch Vice Consul, in the pilgrimage trade. This partnership does indeed appear as a logical solution to Alsagoff's problem, with Alsagoff guaranteeing his own access to Javanese passports by sharing profit with the Dutch consul. However, regardless of outcome, Alsagoff's attempts to impact the Dutch consulate's behavior through the British consulate serve as a strong example of his role in intercolonial conflict.

Conflict with Ottoman Authorities

Another similar example of Alsagoff's positioning in intergovernmental disputes involves his role in the British Consulate's interactions with the Ottoman authorities in 1877. During the same months as the conflict over the *SS Medina*, Alsagoff and Beyts exchanged several letters referencing the imprisonment of pilgrimage brokers in Mecca.¹⁵¹ The phrase 'pilgrimage brokers' in general refers to individuals who managed the hajj from when pilgrims arrived in Jeddah to when they boarded a steamship home. These brokers, also referred to as guides or simply 'sheiks' in the consulate records, took care of and managed groups of pilgrims, providing them with local knowledge and support, and travelling with them as they completed the hajj.¹⁵² Several brokers based in Mecca worked for Alsagoff, collecting pilgrims from his ships when they arrived in Jeddah and helping him coordinate between groups of pilgrims and the steamships he chartered through Beyts. Alsagoff refers to them doing business for him specifically, although these individuals were also part of a larger group of brokers officially

¹⁵¹ See records from December 1876 and January 1877 in FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁵² Miller, "Pilgrims' Progress," 199. Beyts & Co to H. B. M's Consul, 19 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

appointed by Ottoman authorities.¹⁵³ Alsagoff enacted much of his control over the hajj and his previously mentioned debt system through these brokers.

In late December 1876, the Grand Sherif of Mecca imprisoned two of Alsagoff's pilgrimage brokers, citing misdeeds that Beyts had already punished them for as British subjects.¹⁵⁴ The imprisonment of these two brokers was not an isolated incident, nor out of character for the Ottomans. Letters in the consulate records throughout Beyts' tenure as consul refer to similar struggles between Ottoman and British authorities. Especially in 1877, conflicts over authority and the rights of governments to punish individuals or enact laws were in keeping with growing tension between the Ottoman and British governments.¹⁵⁵ Yet in this instance, the conflict over authority is not isolated to a British/Ottoman question. Alsagoff's relationship with Beyts appears central to the imprisonment of these two brokers, and consulate correspondence over the issue suggests that the Ottomans were attempting to actively undermine Alsagoff's power over the hajj business. In response, Alsagoff turned his relationship with the British consulate, relying on Beyts to push back against Ottoman efforts.

Two key letters from the British consulate frame and summarize the collection of consular documents regarding the imprisonment of these brokers. In one, Beyts' Vice Consul A. B. Wylde directly addresses the Grand Sherif and requests the brokers' release, while in the other Beyts explains the conflict to the British representative in Constantinople. The first focuses on Alsagoff's relationship to the British India Steam Navigation Company, and references Ottoman attempts to undermine Alsagoff. Wylde tells the Grad Sherif about "a letter which I have

¹⁵³ G Beyts to the Right Honorable Lord Derby, 30 March 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA; Syed Moh'd O Alsagoff to Captain Beyts, 10 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁵⁴ G. Beyts to His Excellency Sir H. Elliot, Her Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople, 13 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁵⁵ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 7–10.

received from the agents of the British India Steam Navigation Co in which they inform me that their agent's brokers (British subjects) at Mecca have been prevented from engaging pilgrims for their steamers and have been imprisoned."¹⁵⁶ These brokers are clearly paid and managed by Alsagoff, as opposed to by Beyts' firm. Alsagoff's letters to Beyts in the consulate record give updates about these brokers, and occasionally Alsagoff's letters to his brokers themselves appear copied in Beyts' consulate records.¹⁵⁷ Yet Wylde presents Alsagoff's brokers as belonging to an agent of the agents of BI, thereby emphasizing the unity between Alsagoff and Beyts. Wylde's letter goes on to suggest that the Sherif's actions are directly in response to the Alsagoff/Beyts partnership, referencing an Ottoman "order prohibiting brokers from assisting the British India Steam Navigation Company and Messrs Beyts & Co's vessels."¹⁵⁸ Since the brokers were interacting with BI vessels only through Alsagoff, the referenced Ottoman prohibition appears aimed at eliminating Alsagoff's source of steamships. At least from Wylde's perspective, Ottoman imprisonment of Alsagoff's brokers was an attempt to undermine Alsagoff's integration with the British colonial government and British merchants.

In response to Ottoman attempts to undermine his power and connections, Alsagoff apparently turned to Beyts for support and leveraged his British connections. Following a request from Alsagoff for "assistance" with imprisoned brokers, Beyts sent a letter to the British Embassy in Constantinople, presenting Ottoman actions against Alsagoff as direct aggression against the British consulate. Using strong language and provocative imagery, Beyts explains that the Ottoman imprisonment of Alsagoff's brokers is "a blow aimed to lay consular authority prostrate," because "the men who were imprisoned were not pilgrims, but they were British

¹⁵⁶ A. B. Wylde to His Excellency the Governor General of the Hedjas, 30 December 1876, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁵⁷ Said Mohd bin Omer El Sagoff to Sheik Sadik Muslim, 23 January 1877.

¹⁵⁸ A. B. Wylde to His Excellency the Governor General of the Hedjas, 30 December 1876, FO 78/2649, TNA.

subjects.”¹⁵⁹ Certainly, Beyts had a strong personal incentive for fighting the imprisonment of Alsagoff’s brokers. His own firm’s business relied on Alsagoff’s ability to coordinate pilgrimage traffic, organize tickets, and find passengers to fill their steamships. Yet Beyts’ letter to Constantinople does more than fight for Beyts’ own interests. Indeed, it takes the same approach as Alsagoff’s previously discussed letter to the British government regarding conflict with the Dutch consul. Beyts’ letter uses provocative language that addresses British power and pride, suggesting that the British would be falling “prostrate” to the Ottoman authorities if they do not protect Alsagoff’s brokers. Similar to the approach of Alsagoff’s letter, Beyts portrays the Ottoman government as corrupt because they have imprisoned British citizens without a fair trial. His letter serves as a challenge to British pride, and places Alsagoff’s interests in the middle of the conflict between British and Ottoman authorities.

Wylde’s letter to the Sherif of Mecca suggests that the Ottoman imprisonment of Alsagoff’s brokers was aimed not directly at the British consulate but at Alsagoff’s relationship with Beyts. In contrast, Beyts’ letter to the British Embassy in Constantinople attempts to shift the conflict to a British/Ottoman problem and spur his superiors in the British government to act. In this way, Beyts helps Alsagoff to use broad colonial conflict as a solution to the lower-level problem of broker imprisonment. This is the same approach that appears in Alsagoff’s direct response to the Dutch consul’s withholding of passports. Through making his immediate business difficulties a matter of British colonial pride, Alsagoff uses intergovernmental conflict to advance his own interests and solve problems. Through his relationship with Beyts, Alsagoff becomes an active participant in colonial rivalries.

¹⁵⁹ G. Beyts to His Excellency Sir H. Elliot, Her Majesty’s Ambassador to Constantinople, 13 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

3. The Politics of Intercorporate Disputes: Hadrami Power in British Colonial Courts

Small mercantile firms and agents in Jeddah had to navigate the broad power dynamics of colonial governments while simultaneously managing the low-level politics of their daily business interactions and relationships. From 1874 to 1878, Captain Beyts' narrative explicitly combines these two ideas, uniting the interests of the British colonial government with those of Beyts' own small shipping firm and his parent company, BI. As shown in the second chapter, during these years Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff joined with Beyts and attempted to use the overarching interests of colonial governments to solve problems in his daily business ventures. The question at hand then becomes: what happened to these dynamics after 1878 when Captain George Beyts was removed from the British Consulate in Jeddah? Historians looking at hajj traffic through Jeddah during the 1880s have noted the existence of a monopoly system over the Malay and Javanese pilgrimage, beginning in 1883 and lasting in essence through the early 1900s.¹⁶⁰ Through 1888 this monopoly involved many individuals who also appear in Beyts' story during the 1870s, including J. S. Oswald, P. N. Van der Chijs, and of course Alsagoff.¹⁶¹ Beyts himself and his firm remain notably absent from discussions of this monopoly, despite BI's continued connection through J. S. Oswald.¹⁶² However, records from the British Foreign

¹⁶⁰ The monopoly was briefly broken up in 1888 when the Ottoman partners attempted to expand into Indian pilgrims. At that point some of the partners changed, although Alsagoff remained. Ochsenswald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia*, 101–6; Low, "The Infidel Piloting the True Believer," 73–75.

¹⁶¹ Low, "The Mechanics of Mecca," 252.

¹⁶² See discussions of J.S. Oswald and BI at the end of the first chapter.

Office suggest that Beyts' firm was significantly involved in early incarnations of Alsagoff's monopoly scheme as it developed between 1878 and 1883. In this context, it makes sense that records from 1881 show a shift in their relationship. Whereas Alsagoff and Beyts appear mutually reliant on each other as business partners in the 1870s, the early 1880s witnessed Alsagoff and other Hadrami merchants gain power over their European partners in the hajj business.

A British consular court case regarding debts from the 1880-1881 pilgrimage season provides an important window into the power dynamics between European and Arab merchants involved in the transport of Malay and Javanese pilgrims. The case itself took place in May and June of 1881, and records include both the original transcripts as well as opinions written following an appeal to the British consular court in Constantinople.¹⁶³ The details of the case deal with somewhat trivial amounts of money -- the main contention is over \$603, representing approximately 5% of the profit from two pilgrimage ships of the 1880/1881 season.¹⁶⁴ Yet the backbone of the case rests on a struggle for power. The \$603 represents control in the burgeoning hajj transport monopoly and arguments reveal a struggle to pinpoint the ultimate worth of Hadrami connections in the pilgrimage trade. While previous chapters show the relationship between a single European merchant and his Hadrami partner, this court case

¹⁶³ Wylde, Beyts & Co to Her Britannic Majesty's Supreme Consular Court at Constantinople, "Petition of Appeal," 13 June 1881, FO 780/174.

¹⁶⁴ Monetary accounts at the end of the court records indicate that a single adult could journey from Jeddah to Singapore for a debt of \$12. Although the court case references multiple forms of currency throughout, including Turkish Piasters and British Pounds, these accounts are all written in Singaporean Dollars, which is the currency the debts would be collected in. According to the BI time tables, 100 Dollars from Penang or Singapore were worth 225 Rupees in 1881. The exchange rate for Rupees in 1881 was 19.9 British Pence, making \$603 from Singapore worth approximately 112 British pounds in 1881. This is in stark contrast to the court case from 1878 against BI in chapter one which charged a 10,000 Rupee or 875 British Pound fine. Andrew, *Indian Currency Problems of the Last Decade*, 551. "Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company," No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA. "1881 British India Steam Navigation Co", Time Tables 1881, BIS/29/1, NMM.

broadens the discussion to include multiple European and Hadrami merchants. Thus, it provides a bridge not only between 1878 and 1883, but also between the relationship of two individuals and their corresponding larger groups within Jeddah. The case showcases power dynamics at the intersection between European and Arab corporate interests. At the end of the day, it suggests that in instances of conflict Hadrami merchants held the upper hand over business relations in Jeddah. This relational power comes through in the court case in the implementation of partnership agreements, the role of language, and the impact of reputation.

A Pilgrimage Arrangement

Although the case nominally involved only a single defendant (Wylde, Beyts, & Co) and plaintiff (Hadrami merchant Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi), the arguments revolved around the details of a many-partner business arrangement during the 1880-1881 pilgrimage season. Basically, several firms involved in the Malay and Javanese pilgrimage decided to pool their costs and profits, limiting the risk of pilgrim transport and enabling price inflation. This setup required the court to acquire testimony regarding the arrangement from a majority of the interests and partners involved. Among these partners were three main shipping firms, including Wylde, Beyts & Co; Alsagoff & Co (formerly the Singapore Steamship Company); and another firm known as Hafizodeen & Co.¹⁶⁵ Also invested to varying degrees were J. S. Oswald, P. N. Van der Chijs (representing the Ocean Steamship Company), a wealthy local merchant named Moosa Baghdadee, and a Hadrami merchant with familial connections in Singapore named Mohamed Balfaghi, among others. Throughout the pilgrimage season, these groups and individuals kept a running list of debts to each other, all to be paid at the end of the season, or when passage money

¹⁶⁵ Spellings from the court case itself are used consistently throughout the case. In instances where the record differs internally (such as with the spelling of Hafizodeen), the default is the spelling used by Consul James Zohrab in his opinion sent to the Consular Court in Constantinople upon appeal.

was eventually acquired. The 1881 case at hand began when Balfaghi accused Wylde, Beyts, & Co of incorrectly totaling these debts at the end of the season. However, an understanding of the case's details first requires an understanding of the people.

Most importantly, although Captain George Beyts was still BI's agent in Suez during 1881, various records suggest that his involvement in Jeddah during the early 1880s declined. In the BI timetables, the listed agency in Jeddah switches from G. Beyts & Co to Wylde, Beyts, & Co in 1880.¹⁶⁶ Although Captain Beyts may have retained financial investment, his involvement in the management of Wylde, Beyts, & Co during these years appears limited. Instead, much of the firm's business in Jeddah appears to have been in the hands of his son, Noel H. Beyts. While not much information exists regarding Captain Beyts' son, Noel appears in references throughout the late 1870s and through the 1880s in BI and consulate records. For example, British consulate records mention him replacing his father as Acting Consul in Jeddah during brief periods while Captain Beyts was away from the city.¹⁶⁷ A mention in BI board meeting notes from 1886 requests information regarding whether Noel Beyts is "still a partner" in Wylde, Beyts, & Co.¹⁶⁸ Other BI board minutes from 1882 request that Captain Beyts travel from Suez to Jeddah to collect money from Wylde, Beyts & Co.¹⁶⁹ Lastly, although the court case from 1881 does not mention Noel's specific role in the company, he is the only current partner of Wylde, Beyts, &

¹⁶⁶ It is unclear what exactly this change in the time tables represents. During the 1870s, G. Beyts & Co is listed as the agent at Jeddah, although the firm of Wylde Beyts & Co clearly manages BI business in Jeddah. For example, the references to BI agents in the case of the SS *Medina* all refer to Wylde, Beyts & Co as opposed to G. Beyts & Co. However, the change to listing the agencies differently in 1880 does support the idea that a new distinction was being introduced that had not previously needed to be made. "1880 British India Steam Navigation Co", Time Tables 1880, BIS/29/1, NMM.

¹⁶⁷ "Consul Beyts No. 9," 1 June 1878, FO 78/2870, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ The exact reasons for why they wanted to know are unclear. "Agencies at Jeddah and Suakin," 28 January 1886, BIS/1/4, NMM.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Co to provide a witness statement.¹⁷⁰ Together, these records suggest that at the time of this court case Captain Beyts was managing BI business in Suez while his son and former close partners continued running BI activities in Jeddah through his old firm.

Alsaogff, in contrast to Beyts, appears to have accumulated more prominence in the pilgrimage business between 1878 and 1881. Although several firms and wealthy individuals partook in the organization and pooling of risk for the 1880/1881 pilgrimage season, Alsagoff comes through as the clear mastermind. This positioning makes sense given earlier discussions of pilgrim debt and promissory notes that allowed destitute pilgrims to return home on Alsagoff and Beyts' steamships. Alsagoff's position of owning plantations in Singapore and being able to collect on debts from pilgrims gave him a unique position in Jeddah during the 1870s. Likewise, in the records of 1881 Alsagoff's role in the pooled pilgrimage association is foundational and necessary for its function.¹⁷¹ He makes out all of the group's promissory notes to pilgrims in his name and manages the debt.¹⁷² Whereas in 1878 Alsagoff's partnership with Beyts was loosely defined and limited in scope, the association of 1880 has clearly defined parameters and relationships. The organizational structure of 1880 was not yet a monopoly (for one thing it is explicitly noted that the companies involved have pilgrimage ships outside the general combination).¹⁷³ Yet Alsagoff's relationships had shifted in that direction, moving from beneficial friendships and shared ships to structured agreements regarding debt and pricing. The

¹⁷⁰ *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁷¹ This is of course also true in the monopoly following 1883. Low, "The Infidel Piloting the True Believer," 74.

¹⁷² "Seyd Omar Sagoff examined," in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁷³ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty's Supreme Court at Constantinople, "Reply to the Record of Opinion," 16 June 1881, FO 780/174, TNA; "N. Beyts examined" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

developing strategy was already producing dividends – the price of a native ticket to Singapore on one of Beyts’ ships doubled between 1878 and 1880.¹⁷⁴

In addition to Beyts and Alsagoff, another individual of note who appears as a key witness and contributor in the arrangements of 1880/1881 is J. S. Oswald. Although he was a partner in Wylde, Beyts, & Co during the 1870s, he is mentioned as a former partner during court proceedings in May 1881.¹⁷⁵ In the June 1881 appeals process Balfaghi notes that Oswald left Wylde, Beyts & Co exactly two years prior.¹⁷⁶ However, Balfaghi also complains that Oswald is biased because he is still financially invested in his old company; the exact arrangements and Oswald’s position regarding the pilgrimage agreements are unclear.¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, Oswald also has somewhat of a dual role in the court proceedings of 1881. While he functions as a witness regarding the ownership and movement of promissory notes within the pilgrimage association, he also serves as an outside assessor for the court. In the explanation of the case that James Zohrab sends to Constantinople, Zohrab explains that he asked three outside businessmen to act as assessors alongside him, so that the court could not be easily accused of bias. Oswald was one of these men, along with Hafizoodeen (the third member of the

¹⁷⁴ This is not a general statement, but one based on the comparison of rates on Beyts’ ships to Singapore during the pilgrimage season. As stated, a ticket on the SS *Patna* in 1878 was \$6, in contrast to the note in this chapter that places the price of a ticket at \$12, as stated in the accounts of the court case.

¹⁷⁵ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty’s Supreme Court at Constantinople, “Reply to Petition of Appeal,” 16 June 1881, FO 780/174, TNA

¹⁷⁶ It should be noted that this statement is not entirely consistent with the rest of the court proceedings. If Oswald had left Wylde, Beyts, & Co exactly two years prior in June 1881, he would not have been a partner in the firm during the 1880 pilgrimage season. Yet, in a witness statement he refers to actions he took on behalf of the firm and the responses of his “other partners.” “J. S. Oswald examined” in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁷⁷ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty’s Supreme Court at Constantinople, “Reply to the Record of Opinion.”

partnership) and Hasan Johar (an important figure and Oswald's partner in the later monopoly).¹⁷⁸

The financial involvement of another recurring character, P. N. Van der Chijs, is much clearer. In the previously addressed arguments between the British and Dutch consulates in 1877 and 1878, Van der Chijs functioned as Beyts and Alsagoff's enemy. He was the Dutch Vice Consul at the time and was known to handle most of the Dutch Consul's English correspondence, which included the quarrels with Beyts. However, by 1880 Van der Chijs has apparently reached a peaceable resolution with both Beyts and Alsagoff. Although his company, the Ocean Steamship Company, was not part of the pilgrimage pool, Van der Chijs himself invested money and received profit in the pilgrimage pool organized by Alsagoff. Presumably this arrangement functioned basically as a bribe to release pilgrimage passports, as the issues with Dutch passport control do not reappear after Beyts leaves the consulate. Wylde Beyts and Co also appears to explicitly bribe Van der Chijs, referencing in witness statements a vague agreement where they "privately . . . paid Mr. Van der Chijs something as a gift."¹⁷⁹ These payments, as well as acknowledgements that Van der Chijs held inordinate influence over Alsagoff, carry forward the power dynamics of chapter two.¹⁸⁰ As shown, the Dutch Consul (and thus Van der Chijs) held a level of control over Alsagoff's pilgrimage business due to the fact that Alsagoff's pilgrims were mostly from Dutch-controlled areas. Van der Chijs seems to have used this leverage to assure his own position in the pilgrimage business.

¹⁷⁸ Low, "The Infidel Piloting the True Believer," 73.

¹⁷⁹ "By J. S. Oswald" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

¹⁸⁰ "Mr. H. Russell examined" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 7 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

The foundation of the court case was a three-company agreement referred to as the “co-partnery.” This association involved three firms that agreed to pool all costs and profits from the majority of their pilgrim-carrying steamships for that season. The pooling of resources enabled each company to carry less risk associated with debt from promissory notes and offset the reality that some pilgrimage ships were generally much more successful than others. Under the main agreement, each of the three firms was entitled to exactly one third of all profit from the association’s ships. However, each of the co-partners was in turn a collective with sub-partners. In the case of Wylde, Beyts & Co, their sub-partners included the wealthy merchant Moosa Baghdadee as well as the Hadrami merchant Balfaghi (plaintiff in the court case at hand).¹⁸¹ Alsagoff’s main sub-partner was Van der Chijs, although merchants Hassan Johar and Omar Effendi are also mentioned as interested in Alsagoff’s third. Each co-partner made separate arrangements with their sub-partners for the distribution of profits; for example, Wylde, Beyts & Co received half of their allotment of the profits, while Baghdadee got one third and Balfaghi the remaining sixth.¹⁸² The specifics of Alsagoff’s arrangements are not forthcoming. What is clear, however, is that the debts and profits were almost entirely “passed in accounts.”¹⁸³ That is, debts and profits were manipulated in account books throughout the season, but actual money did not change hands until the pilgrimage season was done.

¹⁸¹ Moosa Baghdadee is also referenced as a merchant with close ties to the Ottoman authorities and the ability to influence Ottoman policy with regards to the broker imprisonment in the second chapter. G. Beyts to His Excellency Sir H. Elliot, Her Majesty’s Ambassador to Constantinople, 13 January 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

¹⁸² This division is stated different ways in the case records. Although more confusing, it seems more accurate to say that Moosa Baghdadee was due one third of the profit; Balfaghi had a separate arrangement with Wylde Beyts & Co that entitled him to a quarter of the company’s direct profit, meaning he received $\frac{1}{4}$ of their $\frac{2}{3}$ of the profit, leaving the firm with $\frac{1}{2}$ and Balfaghi with $\frac{1}{6}$. “Mr. H. Russell examined” in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

¹⁸³ “Plaintiff States” in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 5 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

In May of 1881, Balfaghi made plans to return to Singapore from Jeddah and requested a settlement of accounts with Wylde Beyts & Co from the 1880/1881 pilgrimage season. Upon receiving the firm's tally of debts, Balfaghi wrote that he would temporarily accept settlement of these accounts, on the condition that he could contest them later when back in Jeddah. Wylde, Beyts & Co refused this condition, stating that "the balance of your account showing the share due to you on the season's transactions . . . is at your disposal, provided you unconditionally accept the account as binding and final."¹⁸⁴ Balfaghi took them to court with his own interpretation of the debts owed and rendered. Most of the disagreements were small and carried little weight; the judge simply made a decision regarding whose claim was justified. Yet one row of the debts sheet triggered a week of debate, eight witness statements, and an appeal to Constantinople.

Balfaghi claimed that Wylde Beyts & Co owed him \$603 more than accounts showed following the sale of promissory notes from two ships, the *SS Afghan* and *SS Glenroy*. Balfaghi argued that he bought these promissory notes (basically collectable ticket debt) from Alsagoff directly, outside of his association with Wylde, Beyts & Co, at a 50% discount. Noel Beyts, representing Wylde Beyts & Co, countered that the notes of the *SS Afghan* and *SS Glenroy* were owned by the firm when Balfaghi bought them. Furthermore, he explains that notes owned by the firm had to be sold at 40% discount based on a convoluted sub-partner agreement involving Van der Chijs.¹⁸⁵ The \$603 represents 10% of the profit that Wylde, Beyts & Co were due on these ships, and thus the difference between Balfaghi buying the notes from Alsagoff or within his sub-partnership. Many of the details of the case are disagreed upon in the transcripts.

¹⁸⁴ "Wylde Beyts & Co to Syed Mohamed Balfaghi" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 7, 23 April 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ "Mr. H. Russell examined" in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

Regardless, the specific details of debt ownership are tangential to the overarching question of power dynamics among the steamship firms and merchants involved in the case.

Consistently throughout the court records, discussions and definitions of partnership play a critical role in assessing the relational power of various individuals. Generally, the specific monetary partnerships as described above are agreed upon, at a baseline level, by witnesses. The “co-partners” consisted of three major firms, while each partner had additional “sub-partners” under differing internal agreements. The co-partners were automatically entitled to equal shares, and their arrangement was based on that sense of equality.¹⁸⁶ In one meeting towards the beginning of the pilgrimage season, Alsagoff fought his partners to sell promissory notes at a certain rate to specific people. Regardless, when his co-partners disagreed Alsagoff accepted that he had been out-voted and did not sell the notes.¹⁸⁷ The three firms, equally invested and due equal profits, for the purposes of the pilgrimage were partners with equal monetary control. In this monetary sense of the word, ‘power’, the relative station of these merchants appears straightforward and set in the partnership agreement. Balfaghi, as the individual in the general partnership with the smallest stated share, had the least direct monetary control. However, he consistently challenges this position of least power through positioning himself as Alsagoff’s equal due to his parallel Hadrami status and family connections in Singapore. His successful challenges and inflated position suggest that in the pilgrimage business, connections within the Hadrami network were more correlated to power than the specifics of business agreements.

Balfaghi explicitly challenges his status as Wylde Beyts & Co’s sub-partner, preferring to showcase himself as a businessman equivalent to Alsagoff. Through positioning himself this

¹⁸⁶ James Zohrab to Her Britannic Majesty’s Consular Court, Jeddah, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 7, 23 May 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁸⁷ “Seyd Omar Sagoff examined,” in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

way, he seeks authority over the pilgrimage that ignores his sub-partner role in favor of his status as a Hadrami merchant. In contrast, Wylde Beyts & Co actively fights that portrayal in court. For example, during witness testimony Henry Russell (Wylde Beyts & Co's cashier) describes an interaction with Balfaghi and Alsagoff:

Balfaghi and Sagoff quarreled about the working (Balfaghi was working at Sagoff's as our representative) of the steamers. I went to Sagoff and threatened to take the two steamers away and work them myself if Balfaghi was not allowed to work them. Sagoff then gave way, & Balfaghi was permitted to go in quietly with the work in Sagoff's office. I had to go to Van der Chijs & get him to use his influence with Sagoff, to get matters settled amicably.¹⁸⁸

This depiction of Balfaghi as the “representative” of Wylde Beyts & Co maintains the relative power structure of the set pilgrimage agreement. Balfaghi has a relationship where he does work for the firm, yet his position in the merchant community (i.e. with Alsagoff) relies on Wylde Beyts & Co's support and endorsement. Similarly, the pilgrimage agreement sets Balfaghi's profits as a direct proportion of the money Wylde Beyts & Co makes. However, the relationships become more complicated with the addition of Van der Chijs, who is Alsagoff's sub-partner but also another European merchant. Through Van der Chijs, Russell portrays two European merchants as solving a dispute between two Hadrami merchants. In this scenario, the European/Hadrami distinction is overlaid on the co-partner/sub-partner relationships. In the narrative, Balfaghi's sub-partner and “representative” status limits his power; however, Van der Chijs' similar position does not negate his influence over Alsagoff in solving the dispute. Russell in this way gives the European/Hadrami dynamic more importance than the partner arrangements in the power relations between merchants.

¹⁸⁸ “Mr. H. Russell examined” in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

Two of the court's additional assessors, Oswald and Hafizoodeen, recorded an official opinion on the case which counters the situation Russell presents regarding influence. Although Oswald and Hafizoodeen generally side with Wylde Beyts & Co (Balfaghi claims that Oswald "tries to advocate [the defendants'] cause and explain everything to their advantage"), the assessors refer to Balfaghi and Alsagoff together as "the joint general manager and the most competent authorities on the subject [of pilgrimage debt]."¹⁸⁹ Here, Oswald is referencing a prediction set forth by the two Hadrami merchants regarding the debt that would accumulate that season. In every other reference to the pilgrimage association's general manager, only Alsagoff is named. Yet here, Oswald includes Balfaghi as almost Alsagoff's equal in level of authority, as the "joint general manager," presumably due to the fact that they are both Hadrami merchants from Singapore. Balfaghi, for his part, certainly notices the comment, writing in reply that Oswald's statement "comes a good deal nearer to the truth than Mr. Russell's saying that I was working at Sagaff's as their (the defendants') representative."¹⁹⁰ Balfaghi presents Oswald and Russell's statements as mutually exclusive, positing that being an authority on the pilgrimage means he was not also a representative of Wylde Beyts & Co. In other words, the Hadrami status which labels him as an authority outweighs the monetary arrangements that give Wylde Beyts & Co power over him. This framework is similar to Russell's in that it presents a merchant's influence as tied to his ethnic origins (although of course in favor of opposite groups). Statements from both European and Hadrami accounts acknowledge that a merchant's identity superceded specific monetary arrangements for determining his power in the hajj business.

¹⁸⁹ J.S. Oswald and M. Hafizoodeen to Her Britannic Majesty's Consular Court in Jeddah, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 33, n.d., FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁹⁰ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty's Supreme Court at Constantinople, "Reply to the Record of Opinion."

The apparent sense of agreement on both the European and Hadrami sides that origin determines business influence eventually culminates in a power imbalance within the court records. Although Russell seems to briefly portray Europeans as more influential, Balfaghi's subsequent arguments regarding debt collection skew this dynamic in favor of Hadrami power. In a strongly worded attack on European motives in the debt business, Balfaghi states:

As to the defendants taking over bonds themselves I doubt whether they could have done so, without a special arrangement for the sale of their personal share made beforehand; for taking over or keeping such an amount of bonds and sending them to Singapore for collection is a transaction which includes a good deal of risk and requires more ready capital than I know the defendants to possess. [. . . Promissory] notes besides are so very difficult to collect that all the other Europeans interested in out combination . . . would not keep them. . . Only people with very intimate relatives in the Straits, like Seyed Sagaff and I have, will risk buying or keeping for their account such debts.¹⁹¹

Balfaghi argues that at the end of the day the business of pilgrimage debt will never be as profitable for Europeans as it is for Hadrami merchants such as himself and Alsagoff. The rationale is quite simple; Hadrami families in Singapore could collect on the debt and make a profit without selling the debt at a discount. Beyts' firm may have made money off taking risk, but their ability to do so was solely a function of their relationships with Hadrami merchants. In this way any success of Wylde Beyts & Co was a direct function of Hadrami success, not the other way around.

This debt collection argument plays an important role in the judge's (Consul Zohrab's) decision to side with Balfaghi. During his opinion, he repeatedly questions Wylde Beyts & Co's motives in the speculation business, as a European firm that could not collect debt themselves. He distinguishes between "native" and "European" speculators in the same way Balfaghi does, consequently connecting the Hadrami/European distinction with a new undertone of monetary

¹⁹¹ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty's Supreme Court at Constantinople, "Reply to the Record of Opinion."

power. From this perspective, it does not matter that Balfaghi was technically a sub-partner, because even the British Consul argues that being Hadrami in these business deals determines one's role and power over European merchants. As opposed to in Russell's argument, where the European/Hadrami and co-partner/sub-partner alliances conflicted, the lens of debt collection aligns monetary control along ethnic lines. Hadrami merchants had a perceived inherent monetary power over European agents in dealings around the pilgrimage. This inherent monetary power aided Balfaghi's argument that his Hadrami status was more important than the relational power structure of partnership agreements.

The Language of Business

In records of the case between Balfaghi and Wylde, Beyts & Co, the concept of power appears not only as monetary control but also as control over mechanisms of doing business. Power dynamics between business partners often reside in the technical details of their interactions and the symbolism of these details. For example, the individual who decides where the meetings should take place or how they should be run has power over the other.¹⁹² One of the clearest ways this type of business power presents in the 1881 case is through language and the verbal nature of business arrangements between partners. Consistently throughout the court records, witnesses and written statements note the verbal nature of agreements. In his concluding remarks the British judge (Consul Zohrab) thoroughly condemns this tendency:

In this suit . . . there is no written agreement, the arrangement is verbal, a transaction involving some hundreds of pounds is entered in on verbal conditions, . . . there does not

¹⁹² Much scholarship has been done on this topic, especially in terms of globalization and modern forms of business. Specifically, regarding language (the focus of this subsection), immense amounts of scholarship discuss the relational power of English as the primary language of business in the modern day. For just two of these references on symbolic power and network dynamics for details such as location or language in business, see Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*; Grewal, *Network Power*.

exist a word in writing as to the conditions, . . . all everything is verbal, and this court cannot too strongly censure such a method of doing business.¹⁹³

Not only were most arrangements verbal, but witnesses state that all discussions and meetings were conducted in Arabic and at the houses of Alsagoff and Moosa Baghdadee in Jeddah.¹⁹⁴ The use of Arabic combines with the prominence of verbal agreements to give Arab merchants significant power in these Arab/European partnerships. Not only were agents such as Alsagoff setting the terms of business, but they were doing so in a manner that put European agents (for whom Arabic was a second language if they spoke it at all) at a severe disadvantage during negotiations.

The disadvantage of European merchants in these verbal Arabic agreements did not escape notice. In his letter to the consulate in Constantinople following appeal, Consul Zohrab notes specifically that European representatives of Wylde, Beyts & Co spoke “very few words of Arabic” while Balfaghi “speaks no European language.”¹⁹⁵ He attributes inconsistencies between the plaintiff and defendant’s accounts to “the fact that communications between the Defendants and Omar El Sagoff were conducted in Arabic, a language but imperfectly known to the defendants.”¹⁹⁶ However, what Zohrab does not explicitly note is that these discussions could have occurred in English. Alsagoff was fairly fluent in English, as shown in his ability to testify

¹⁹³ James Zohrab to Her Britannic Majesty’s Consular Court, Jeddah, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

¹⁹⁴ Moosa Baghdadee is referenced here simply as an extremely wealthy Arab businessman in Jeddah. He is stated to not have connections in Singapore, making him Arab but not part of Alsagoff and Balfaghi’s Hadrami network that enables debt collection through familial connections.

¹⁹⁵ Consul James Zohrab to Her Britannic Majesty’s Supreme Consular Court at Constantinople, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*, No. 1, 17 June 1881, FO 780/174, TNA.

¹⁹⁶ James Zohrab to Her Britannic Majesty’s Consular Court, Jeddah, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

in English and in his English letters included within the consulate records from 1878.¹⁹⁷ As Zohrab states, some of the individuals in the pilgrimage arrangement were fluent only in Arabic, and some in English (this includes all of the Europeans, including Van der Chijs). Either language decision (Arabic or English) would have rendered a disadvantage to some subset of the business partners. Therefore, the fact that discussions were conducted solely in Arabic represents both a symbolic power and an actual advantage of the Arab merchants over the European ones. This advantage also applied to the court room, where Zohrab believed the witness testimony of Arab individuals and decided that the European merchants had been “led inadvertently into error.”¹⁹⁸ Due to these verbal Arabic agreements, Arab merchants held business power over the pilgrimage association as well as receiving preference in the court room.

The Hadrami Reputation

Clearly Hadrami and the superset of Arab merchants held power over European merchants in this pilgrimage association of 1880. Yet, past the question of how power dynamics were structured lies the question of how they unfolded. An answer to this question appears in the court records through the concept of reputation. For merchants and especially merchants in the pilgrimage business, reputation was extremely important for business success. As discussed in both chapters one and two, Captain Beyts explicitly credited his and Alsagoff’s ability to book pilgrims to their reputations.¹⁹⁹ Reputation plays a central role in Hadrami scholarship in general, which frequently associates the power of Hadrami networks to Hadrami reputations as

¹⁹⁷ See Alsagoff’s letters from chapter two. Letters that were originally in Arabic are included in both and translated in consulate records. In contrast, Alsagoff’s letters are written in English and signed by him in both English and Arabic script, meaning they were originally in English and were not translated.

¹⁹⁸ James Zohrab to Her Britannic Majesty’s Consular Court, Jeddah, in *Seyid Mohamed Balfaghi Versus Messrs Wylde Beyts & Company*.

¹⁹⁹ James S. Oswald to the Right Honorable Earl of Derby, 20 May 1877, FO 78/2649, TNA.

trustworthy religious scholars and traders across the Indian Ocean and for centuries.²⁰⁰ In this context, reputation refers to not just an individual's isolated repute but to his legacy and the long-standing prestige of his family. In keeping with this trend, the concept of reputation comes up directly several times throughout the court case between Balfaghi and Wylde, Beyts & Co. For example, Balfaghi references the reliance of European merchants on Hadrami reputations for successful business in Jeddah.

One of the most explicit examples of Balfaghi referencing reputation comes up in his refutation to the opinion letter written by J. S. Oswald and Hafizoodeen. In his response, Balfaghi complains that Oswald is extremely biased in support of Wylde, Beyts & Co. However, one of the reasons that Balfaghi sees this as a problem is that he thinks Oswald owes him for verifying his reputation and thereby enabling Oswald to do business in Jeddah. Specifically, Balfaghi claims that:

[Oswald] seems to have entirely forgotten all I have done for him. I lent him money and obtained for him at his incessant request a *Masbata* sealed by 34 people of this town stating that he was so good, so honest, so clever and so energetic, [that it] enable[d] him to bring about a steamer and a quantity of coal.²⁰¹

Balfaghi's claim is in keeping with the idea that European merchants in Jeddah relied on Hadrami merchants in order to do business. In the previously discussed case of debt collection this reliance is monetary and concrete, in the sense that European merchants were strictly unable to collect on promissory notes in Singapore. Here, the distinction is less concrete as it relies on the reputation of Balfaghi and his ability to certify Oswald as a credible person. Regardless, Balfaghi draws on the idea of reputation to assert that Oswald needed his Hadrami relationship in

²⁰⁰ Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora*, 150–51.

²⁰¹ Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty's Supreme Court at Constantinople, "Reply to the Record of Opinion."

order to do business at all in the first place. The implication is that Balfaghi could help Oswald due to his position of influence and respect in the Jeddah community. In this sense, Balfaghi holds power over the European merchants through his ability to impact their reputations and baseline ability to engage in business in Jeddah.

Oswald also runs into problems with reputation at the very end of his and Hafizoodeen's opinion letter. Apparently as an effort to discredit Alsagoff's testimony, Oswald writes that Alsagoff misstated a date in his testimony. In Consul Zohrab's letter to the consulate in Constantinople, he condemns Oswald's letter as entirely worthless after "reading it and finding that Seyid Omer Segoff, who is one of the leading members of the town, was accused of nothing less than perjury."²⁰² The idea of reputation in this instance comes through as foundational. Alsagoff's reputation is such that Oswald (also a standing member of the merchant community) only hurts his own standing through questioning Alsagoff's reliability. In order to be selected as one of the additional assessors in this court case, Oswald must have held at least a reasonably good reputation within Jeddah. Yet, there is no doubt as to who wins a contest over reliability between himself and Alsagoff. This power of reputation that both Alsagoff and Balfaghi hold over Oswald is consistent with the importance of reputation generally in Hadrami networks on the Indian Ocean. Even in European courts, European merchants could not compete with the social standing of Hadrami businessmen.

All of the individuals involved in the pilgrimage association of 1880 existed within a power structure based predominantly on a merchant's origins and connections. In this scheme, Hadrami merchants held the most sway, with European merchants holding less and local Arab

²⁰² Seyed Mohamed Balfaghi to the Judge of Her Majesty's Supreme Court at Constantinople, "Reply to Petition of Appeal."

merchants somewhere in the middle between the two. In discussions of monetary power, business control over language, and reputation, Balfaghi's positioning exemplifies the relative importance of his Hadrami status over the details of his partnership arrangement with Wylde, Beyts & Co. These power dynamics appear to represent a transition from the situation of 1878, when Alsagoff and Captain Beyts appeared to both need each other for their respective business interests. In other words, this court case witnesses a shift toward increased Hadrami dominance over the steamship hajj. This change makes sense given trends in technology and shifts during the 1870s. Alsagoff needed Beyts during the 1870s as he attempted to access enough steamships and fight the Dutch Consul. For example, in the decade immediately following the opening of the Suez Canal and while steamship technology was ramping up in prevalence, Europeans such as Consul Beyts had access and advantages Alsagoff did not. However, even as early as 1880 Alsagoff seems to have shifted this dynamic, eliminating the problem of the Dutch through the inclusion of Van der Chijs and ending his reliance on BI steamships.²⁰³ While Beyts did depend on Alsagoff in the late 1870s, their relationship was more equal than the European/Hadrami relationships that appear in this court case from 1881.

²⁰³ Of the six ships in this arrangement, only two of them were Wylde Beyts & Co's ships.

Conclusion

The hajj, the process that united Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff and Captain George de Jong Beyts, brought together diverse people and interests long before the 1870s. Yet the hajj of the late 19th century becomes a focus of historians and scholars for a perceived distinctness, and because it was around then that colonial governments such as the British began producing relevant written documents, including reports and laws.²⁰⁴ Scholars have discussed at great length the perspective of the resulting colonial archives and the necessity of combining along-the-grain with across-the-grain reading strategies.²⁰⁵ John Slight, an authority on the British colonial hajj, describes along-the-grain reading as “delineat[ing] the workings of colonial knowledge and governance,” while “conversely, reading against the grain of these documents can attempt to recover the words and agency of indigenous people.”²⁰⁶ For works that rely largely on colonial sources, careful evaluation of multiple perspectives enables the inclusion of actors who are otherwise silenced in the archives. Yet, this distinction between styles of reading also subtly implies that these perspectives are disjoint. One archival approach gives the “colonial knowledge” angle, while the other reveals the separate viewpoint of “indigenous people.”

Hadrami scholarship which relies on non-colonial sources has challenged this type of distinction. In his seminal work on the Hadrami diaspora, Enseng Ho eloquently describes that “Arab and Englishman traveled along the same roads, in similar vehicles, and met one another at

²⁰⁴ For a nuanced discussion of the myriad of ways in which the late 19th century hajj was distinct, from not only the colonial perspective but also from that of Muslims on the Indian Ocean, see Green, “The Hajj as Its Own Undoing.”

²⁰⁵ Roque and Wagner, *Engaging Colonial Knowledge*, 24–25.

²⁰⁶ Slight, “British Colonial Knowledge and the Hajj in the Age of Empire,” 84.

the same stops.”²⁰⁷ Alsagoff and Beyts were two of these figures – an Arab and an Englishman who traversed the same paths using not just similar, but the same, steamships. As businessmen they both relied heavily on their friendship, combining the advantages of Beyts’ BI position and consular access with the immense reputation and influence of Alsagoff, tied to his position in the Hadrami community.

This study presented Alsagoff and Beyts’ friendship along the same lines as Ho’s portrayal of Hadrami and European networks. However, in contrast to Ho’s work, the reliance on colonial sources necessitated combining strategies such as reading with and against the grain of the archives. This approach as Slight describes it might unintentionally separate Alsagoff and Beyts’ perspectives and limit interpretations of their relationship. As a British consul, Beyts might become relegated to “colonial knowledge,” while Alsagoff as a local and an Arab might become separated from Beyts through against-the-grain interpretations. However, addressing the hajj from the added perspective of corporate priorities complicates this association between archive interpretations and specific groups of people. In the present study, varied readings of colonial archives focused on both Beyts and Alsagoff’s businesses. This approach, along with the use of corporate BI archives, enabled exploration of Beyts and Alsagoff’s relationship.

The combination of corporate BI records and Foreign Office consulate documents revealed a conflict between commercial goals and colonial intentions. The first chapter showed how this conflict resulted in BI aligning its hajj interests with local Hadrami structures instead of the British government after 1878. Along-the-grain reading of Foreign Office records suggests that BI withdrew from hajj traffic; however, British officials were certainly not omniscient, and their beliefs that BI became uninvolved reflect only that – their beliefs. A close look at corporate

²⁰⁷ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 269.

records and actions suggests that these beliefs were inaccurate and reveals the strength of Hadrami networks. However, while local power shows through indirectly in BI's actions, an across-the-grain reading of consulate records from 1877 and 1878 highlights Alsagoff's agency directly. In the second chapter, records of open conflicts between governments held evidence of a close relationship between Beyts and Alsagoff and showed Alsagoff's active participation in colonial controversy. The third chapter similarly relied on colonial records, but this time through an 1881 court case involving intercorporate conflict. Here, the goal was to extrapolate from a singular European/Hadrami relationship to involve more actors, as well as to show an evolution. The power dynamics between Beyts and Alsagoff were not static, as Alsagoff continued to accumulate power and influence through his dealings in the hajj. In contrast to the Foreign Office records, the 1881 case explicitly included Hadrami agency through witness statements.

Each of these arguments points to the inseparability of Beyts and Alsagoff's experiences in Jeddah. Their networks were not simply overlaid but interwoven, and an understanding of one requires an understanding of the other. Their story serves as a warning against oversimplification, showing how consideration of corporate interests complicates divisions between local agency and colonial knowledge. In many ways, this warning therefore mirrors the concept of studying the Indian Ocean World as a trans-regional entity. Distinctions, whether based on regional boundaries or the identities of merchants, artificially hide connections between places and people. The relationship between Captain George de Jong Beyts and Syed Mohammed bin Omar Alsagoff challenges simplified representations of power and knowledge in the world of the 19th century Indian Ocean. Their story is more than a scandal.

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