



Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World

Robert R. Bianchi

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Each year, more than two million pilgrims from over 100 countries converge on the holy city of Mecca to reenact the ritual dramas that Muslims have been performing for centuries. Making the hajj is one of the most important duties in the life of a Muslim. The pilgrimage-and its impact on international politics-is enormous and growing every year, yet Westerners know virtually nothing about it. What is the hajj and what does it mean? Who are the hajjis? What do they do and say in Mecca and how do they interpret their experiences? Who runs the hajj and what are their political objectives? How does the hajj encourage international cooperation among Muslims and can it also promote harmony between Islam and the West? In *Guests of God*, Robert R. Bianchi seeks to answer these and many other questions. While it is first and foremost a religious festival, he shows, the hajj is also very much a political event. The Muslim world's leading multinational organization, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has established the first international regime explicitly devoted to pilgrimage. Every large Muslim nation has developed a comprehensive hajj policy and a powerful bureaucracy to enforce it. Yet, Bianchi argues, no authority-secular or religious, national or international-can really control the hajj. Pilgrims believe that they are entitled to travel freely to Mecca as "Guests of God"-not as guests of any nation or organization that might wish to restrict or profit from their efforts to fulfill a fundamental religious obligation. Drawing on his personal experience as a pilgrim and a wealth of data gathered over the course of ten years of research, Bianchi has produced a fascinating look at the hajj filled with personal, candid stories from political and religious leaders and hajjis from all walks of life. A wide-ranging study of Islam, politics, and power, *Guests of God* is the most complete picture of the hajj available anywhere.

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