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Conference Presentation Report

At the Annual Conference on South Asia hosted by the University of Wisconsin–Madison, I presented a paper on economic aspects of the Hajj from South Asia in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. In the paper, I examined fatwa literature surrounding questions about funding one's pilgrimage travel to the Hijaz and also discussed court cases and family inheritance disputes that emerged from individuals' Haji travel. By looking at pilgrimage travel in this period, I drew attention to the history of connections between Muslims living in British South Asia, including territories that now lie in Pakistan, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In particular, the paper examined different sources of authority governing religious travel at a time when pilgrimage traffic was increasing dramatically. By looking at fatwa literature and debates from the colonial courts of law, the paper also attempted to understand the relationship between the expansion and commercialization of pilgrim travel and the rise of Muslim piety in the era of revival and reform. The questions raised by my paper attempted to draw attention to the expansive reach of codified state law and the authoritative aims of the South Asian 'ulama. These issues are still central to debates about legal interpretation and codification in contemporary Pakistan. My paper sought to highlight some of the historical precedents in these debates while also highlighting some aspects of the social history surrounding Hajj travel from South Asia.