

1 Introduction: Why Jeddah

Jeddah,
 Enchantment of Babel,
 Full of people,
 All the people
 Oh, Gate of Mecca.
 Assuredly, Jeddah first
 ... and Jeddah last.¹
 (Ṭalāl Ḥamzah)

These words stem from a poem entitled ‘Jeddah ghayr’, ‘Jeddah is different’. For the poet, bustling Jeddah with its more than four million inhabitants is superior to the famous Arab metropolises of Cairo, Beirut, and Casablanca. Although he hails from Tobuk in the Northwest of Saudi Arabia and has not lived in Jeddah, many of Jeddah’s inhabitants, as well as many other Saudis, would agree with his characterization. They would, however, associate the city’s ‘difference’ with quite dissimilar meanings. These range from the assertion of a relaxed lifestyle to the annual Jeddah summer festival, until recently called ‘Jeddah ghair’, marketed by the Saudi Tourism Agency², and might include a scathing indictment of the alleged lack of proper urban planning compared to other Saudi cities.³

¹ I would like to thank Abū Bakr Bā Qādir for his comments and discussions of this poem. I have benefitted greatly from his insights even if we continue to differ on a number of points. Poem by Ṭalāl Ḥamzah, ‘Jidda Ghayr’, www.alsh3r.com/poems/view/10246 (accessed October 16, 2019), for a short biography of the poet, see ‘al-Adīb al-Shā‘ir al-Sharīf Ṭalāl Bin Ḥamza Āl Badawī’, alsh3r.com (accessed October 21, 2019).

² Fouzia Khan (June 7, 2014). ‘Spectacular start to Jeddah Ghair’, *Arab News*, www.arabnews.com/node/583047.

³ Mushārī b. ‘Abdallāh al-Na‘īm (June, 2013). ‘Lēh Jidda Ghayr?’. Article on *al-Riyādh*. www.alriyadh.com/847803.

It was a diffuse sense of an amazing diversity amongst the people of Jeddah, my own feeling of ‘Jeddah ghayr’, that struck me when first visiting the city in the year 2000. With its more than four million inhabitants (2017), Jeddah sprawls along the shores of the Red Sea, which also features later in the poem quoted above. It is situated in a region known as the Hijaz, which includes the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. My experience of Jeddah during this first visit differed significantly from the image of a country then known for fabulous wealth and inaccessibility to researchers. I was surprised and overwhelmed by the hospitality and support which I encountered for the research project I was pursuing at the time. This encouraged me to embark on a project about the city’s history a few years later. With time I also came to recognise the differences between Jeddah and other regions, such as the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, situated in the central Arabian Najd region, which has become politically and culturally dominant in many ways, some of which will be explored in this introduction. While the observation that there exists a difference between cities due to their specific histories and local identities is trivial, the sense of ‘Jeddah ghayr’, of a particular distinctiveness of this city, is a well-known trope in Saudi Arabia.

While the *Jiddawi* ‘difference’ might nowadays be mostly associated with the magnificent corniche which brims with life in the evenings, with a multitude of shopping malls, restaurants, and private beach resorts, all of which contrast with the image of most Saudi cities as rather austere, the distinctiveness is also evident in what is left of the formerly walled old city of Jeddah. Many old centres in Saudi Arabia have given way to modern structures. In Jeddah, the old town, or rather the old market streets (*sūq*) still serve as the city’s centre in wholesale cloth trade. The beautiful coral stone buildings with their intricately carved wooden loggias give a sense of the former wealth of their owners. In the old city, as well as in the public spaces such as the corniche or malls, one sees people of many different origins, particularly, but not exclusively, during the season of the pilgrimage to nearby Mecca, the hajj.

In spite of the many changes to ‘The Bride of the Red Sea’, as some inhabitants proudly call their city, the poem composed in the twenty-first century would have resounded with the Swiss traveller John Lewis Burckhardt, who visited Jeddah in 1814. He noted with some astonishment that the inhabitants of Jeddah consisted mostly of ‘foreigners or

their descendants', with the exception of a few learned descendants of the prophet Muhammad.⁴ While local Arabs had perished or emigrated, Burckhardt lists Hadhramis and Yemenis, Indians, Malays, Egyptians, Syrians, North Africans, as well as people from the European and Anatolian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, in addition to Abyssinian slaves. With the exception of the Indians, Burckhardt observes that these people 'are all mixed in one general mass, and live and dress in the same Arab manner'.⁵ Similarly, a glance at the names of the old families of Jeddah, namely those who lived inside the city wall prior to its demolition in 1947, reveals that this plurality is no recent phenomenon. The names al-Baghdādī, al-Isfahānī, al-Bukhārī, al-Takrūnī, and al-Fattānī point to their forebearers' origins in present-day Iraq, Iran, Uzbekistan, the West African Sahel zone, and Pattani in Southern Thailand, respectively, while names like Bā Khashwayn point to the origin of that family in the Hadhramaut region of present-day Yemen.⁶ Burckhardt declared this extraordinary diversity to be the result of the pilgrimage when, in the month of *muḥarram*, large crowds converged on Mecca, often via Jeddah. He also points out that most Jiddawis actually earned their living from trade. In the nineteenth century, labour migrants, merchants, and soldiers from Egypt and the Ottoman Empire at large swelled and diversified the ranks of strangers further. Indeed, Jeddah was not only a main node of pilgrim's journeys but, as will be shown in Chapter 2, a major trade entrepôt in the exchange between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean at various times.

How, I wondered, did people from these very different regions not only pass through the city when performing the pilgrimage but also become so much a part of its very fabric that they are now all recognised locally as its 'old families'? How and where did they find a place to stay and work? To what extent did immigrants form ethnic clusters in the city – something which is a frequent occurrence in present-day

⁴ John Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia: Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hedjaz Which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred*, vol. 1 (London: Colburn, 1829), p. 26. In the Hijaz, a sharif (*sharīf*) is understood to be the son of Ḥasan, whereas a *sayyid* is al-Ḥusayn's son.

⁵ Burckhardt, pp. 26–9, quote p. 27. The term 'Bride of the Red Sea' is also used for the Yemeni port of Hodeida, e.g. *nashwannews.com* (September 27, 2017). 'al-Ḥudayda. al-Ḥarb Taghtālu 'Arūs al-Baḥr al-Aḥmar'. <https://nashwannews.com/83557>.

⁶ Muḥammad Ṭrābulṣī, *Jidda: Hikāyat madīna*, 2nd rev. edn. (1st edn. 2006) (Riyadh: Distributed by Kunūz al-Ma'rifa, 1429/2008), pp. 83–94.

Saudi Arabia due to the ways in which immigrants' lives are regulated? How did subsequent political regimes, Ottoman (1840–1916), Sharifian (1916–25), and Saudi (since 1925) attempt to govern and regulate the urban society and what did it take to become a 'subject' of these states? The Arabic root *gh-y-r* also denotes change, and one of the topics discussed throughout the book, though especially in Chapter 2, is in which ways Jeddah and its population changed throughout the period under investigation.

The aim of this study is hence to investigate the urban history of Jeddah in order to understand how people managed to live in a very diverse setting. 'Living with difference' is one of the ways in which the concept of conviviality has been defined, which makes this a central concept when trying to consider the particular history of Jeddah in a larger setting.⁷ To do so, one needs to consider two related but analytically separate phenomena. The first is that this city of 10,000–20,000 permanent residents (in the nineteenth century) accommodated an annual influx of pilgrims which either doubled the number of inhabitants or multiplied them to up to ten times the normal number.⁸ Until the 1870s and 1880s, when large numbers of pilgrims from the Indian Ocean rim travelled on steamers, shipping depended on the monsoon and often forced pilgrims to spend long periods in Jeddah, Mecca, or Medina either in order to perform the pilgrimage at the right time of the year, or before being able to return. Thus, it became difficult at times to distinguish pilgrims from the second group of people, those heading to Jeddah in search of work and commerce. In fact, it might be better to consider both groups as only partially distinct because some pilgrims, working while waiting for their return passage, eventually decided to settle, while not all of those who came in search of employment managed to establish themselves. Furthermore, some (but by no means all) trade was conducted during the pilgrimage, using the caravans and ships to transport pilgrims as well as goods. The pilgrimage also animated trade due to the large number of people in need of food and water, as well as other goods.

⁷ Magdalena Nowicka and Steven Vertovec, 'Comparing Convivialities: Dreams and Realities of Living-with-Difference', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17 (2014), pp. 341–56.

⁸ For an overview, starting in 1858, see William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), p. 61.

This study deals with the past two centuries and zooms in on the 100 years between 1840 and 1947. Both dates refer to actual events and mark symbolic ruptures in the history of the city. In 1840, Mehmed Ali Pasha, the autonomous governor-general of Ottoman Egypt, had to return the administration of Jeddah to the central Ottoman authorities in Istanbul. This was, initially, a ‘soft’ break given that Egypt had always remained within the Ottoman fold, and that the Emir of Mecca, who had been appointed by Mehmed Ali in 1827 (although detained in Cairo from 1836–40), remained in power until 1851. However, Ottoman reforms, starting in 1838, began to impact Jeddah in different ways in the decades thereafter. Furthermore, 1840 almost coincides with the onset of steamshipping in the Red Sea, something which, together with other technological and geopolitical advances, was to change the economics of Jeddah considerably in the medium term (see Chapter 2).

The destruction of the city wall in 1947 allowed the streets to open to car traffic and for easy communication with the new quarters that had started development outside of the wall. Due to the conditions of World War II, which all but halted the early oil exports, Saudi Arabia’s oil economy took off only in the early 1950s and allowed the country to enjoy an economic boom. In this context, the old urban population gradually moved to the newly established quarters, leaving the old city to new immigrants who often came from the very rural areas against which the wall had sheltered the old families only decades earlier. With time, this came to be understood locally as a fundamentally different phenomenon from the migratory trends which characterised the period under discussion, possibly due to both the different origin of the migrants and the scale of new settlement in the urban area.⁹ It should be added that from the 1950s onwards, air traffic started to change the logistics of the pilgrimage, reducing the period of stay in Jeddah and, since the opening of the new airport in 1981, all but eliminating it through direct transfer from the airport to Mecca.¹⁰

The historical developments in Jeddah and the Red Sea, as well as themes from the urban history pertinent to the questions outlined above, form the bulk of this book. Before delving into the discussion

⁹ This is stressed in most local histories, e.g. Muḥammad al-Nimr, *Ḥārat al-Baḥr: Mawṭin al-ābā’ wa-l-ajdād* (Jeddah: Dār Manṣūr al-Zāmil, 1438/2016–17), p. 249.

¹⁰ David Long, *The Hajj Today: A Survey of the Contemporary Pilgrimage to Makkah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), p. 48.

of these issues, however, it is worthwhile to briefly consider how the engagement with foreign visitors and residents was framed locally and how the local perspective can be brought into conversation with concepts commonly used to discuss such phenomena, namely cosmopolitanism and conviviality.

Conceptualising Diversity in Jeddah: Local Perspectives

For Jiddawis, the different origins of people settled in the city are a part of everyday life instead of a phenomenon which evokes the questions and reflections of the outsider. Because the annual pilgrimage was, and still is, a central element of life in Jeddah, albeit one which is not permanently present, there are local concepts which reflect practices of the pilgrimage and, at the same time, conceptualise the accommodation of strangers. These exist both locally and in conversations with the curious outsider, and recur in literature, proverbs, and oral history.

Hospitality for ‘God’s Guests’ and Its Implications

From a local perspective, what is most commonly discussed and conceptualised both in historiography and in oral accounts is the reception of pilgrims. They are considered *ḍuyūf bayt Allāh al-ḥarām*, ‘guests of God’s sacred house’. To perform pilgrimage to the ‘House of God’, the Ka’ba in Mecca, at least once in one’s life is a core duty for every Muslim who is physically and economically able to do so. The concept of ‘God’s guests’ refers to the notion of a more or less global Muslim community (*umma*), united in faith and worship to the one God. The geographical location of Jeddah as the main port of Mecca put it upon the Jiddawis (as well as the Meccans) to fulfil the duty of hospitality, which obtained an almost sacred character and a moral obligation due to the religious context.

In the past as today, this service for ‘God’s guests’ formed the basis of an entire infrastructure. While it was crucial to the Islamic legitimisation of the state that security was guaranteed and sufficient supplies of foodstuffs reached the Hijaz in time, it was locals who provided housing and transport, in addition to selling food and drink to the pilgrims. This regularly entailed renting private accommodation to complete strangers. Nowadays, the organisation of the pilgrimage is

a matter of pride and international recognition for the Saudi state. This is expressed perhaps most blatantly in the Saudi kings assuming the title ‘Custodian of the Two Holy Places’ in 1986.¹¹ Even if the Ottoman sultan, as well as the short-lived Sharifian government and the first Saudi king ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl Sa‘ūd considered securing the pilgrimage as central to their local and international legitimacy, local actors and arrangements were far more central to the hajj in the pre-oil period than they have been since.

Hospitality is, of course, an important and almost proverbial component of Arab and Muslim culture. The early German writer Christian Hirschfeld published his treatise on hospitality in 1777 and assumes hospitality to be an almost universal virtue. However, he recognises Middle Eastern (in his case: Arab, Turkish, and Persian) culture as especially hospitable and devotes a very long passage to it.¹² Obviously, both concept and practice have undergone significant changes in meaning and application in recent years.¹³ The traditional meaning of Arab hospitality encompasses aspects of ‘security, protection, and respect’, derived from the Bedouin culture of mutual dependence on such hospitality in the absence of government.¹⁴ In the Arabian Peninsula, a number of sacred spaces, locally called *ḥaram*, *ḥawṭa*, or *hijra*, allowed for safe meetings of different tribespeople. Even before Islam, Mecca is said to have been such a space.¹⁵ Outside

¹¹ The rhetoric of serving the ‘guests of God’ (nowadays frequently called *ḍuyūf al-raḥmān*), pervades Saudi official rhetoric, e.g. recent articles on various sections of Saudi society assisting pilgrims, *Tawāsul.info* (September 26, 2019). ‘15 Alf Ṭālib bi-Makka Yanfudhūn 7 Mashārī’ Ṭatawwu ‘iyya li-Khidmat Ḍuyūf al-Raḥmān’. <https://twasul.info/264129>; and *al-Riyāḍ.com* (September 9, 2017). ‘Khayr Ajnād al-Ard.. Khuddām Ḍuyūf Allāh’. www.alriyadh.com/1620985.

¹² Christian Hirschfeld, *Von der Gastfreundschaft: Eine Apologie für die Menschheit* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1777), pp. 100–31. I owe this reference to Jürgen Osterhammel.

¹³ Andrew Shryock, ‘The New Jordanian Hospitality: House, Host, and Guest in the Culture of Public Display’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2004), pp. 35–62; Rana Sobh, Russel Belk and Jonathan Wilson, ‘Islamic Arab Hospitality and Multiculturalism’, *Marketing Theory*, 13 (2013), pp. 443–63; and Annegret Nippa, Peter Herbstreuth, and Hermann Burchardt, *Unterwegs am Golf: Von Basra nach Maskat, Photographien von Hermann Burchardt* (Berlin: Schiler, 2006).

¹⁴ Shryock, *The New Jordanian Hospitality*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Robert Serjeant, ‘Haram and Ḥawṭah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia’ in R. B. Serjeant (ed.), *Arabian History and Civilisation* (Aldershot, Burlington USA, Singapore, and Sydney: Ashgate Variorum Reprints, 1981); Archive Editions

of these sacred spaces, however, the traveller was at the mercy of his hosts, who housed and fed him (or, much more rarely, her). This made the stranger temporarily part of the ‘house’ of his host, removing the aspect of strangeness, placing him under the host’s care and creating mutual bonds of obligation. This notion of hospitality hence differs somewhat from the one put forward, for example, by Kant, who promoted a basic right for strangers to sojourn without consideration for such rules.¹⁶ After the onset of Islam, this traditional value was further enhanced by traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, who enjoined his followers to honour their guests in ways quite similar to the Jewish and Christian tradition.¹⁷

The combination of ‘normal’ hospitality and the special religious imperative resulting from the performance of a sacred duty seems to have created a bond different from that which normally developed between a host and an accidental guest. The temporary acceptance of strangers into local houses, described as ‘voluntaristic cosmopolitanism’ by Pollock, is a phenomenon which can also be observed in other religious contexts.¹⁸ In terms of applied ethics, it might boil down to a wider humanistic attitude, even if rooted in scriptural sources, which Siddiqui aptly sums up as ‘Hospitality in all its forms is what keeps the sacred alive in the ordinary.’¹⁹ This is based on the belief that creation is a consequence of God’s hospitable nature which requires humankind ‘to act in ways that reflect the goodness of the creator’.²⁰ Given that the sojourn in Jeddah was already conducted in the garb of pilgrimage, the *iḥrām*, and that many of the hosts would also join the pilgrims in their journey to Mecca and the proper rites of the pilgrimage, this temporary community might almost be likened to the *communitas* of pilgrims

(Firm), India. Army General Staff Branch, Arab Bureau (Cairo, Egypt), and Great Britain Admiralty War Staff and Intelligence Division, *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia, 1913–1917* (Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire UK: Archive Editions, 1988), pp. 41–58; and T. Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 62.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1795), section 2.3.

¹⁷ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God’s Name* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 20–72.

¹⁸ Sheldon Pollock, ‘Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History’, *Public Culture*, 12 (2000), pp. 591–625, here p. 596.

¹⁹ Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, p. 219. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

discussed by Turner.²¹ This does not preclude that the local population of Jeddah (as well as that of Mecca and Medina) derived considerable moral capital from their hospitable acts, which were seen as a special religious service.²²

It might be this sense of proximity between the hosts and the visitors to God's house which conceptually allowed for an important variation of another central Arabian institution, namely marriage. Even though exogamous marriages were actually quite common in Central Arabian towns, among both people without as well as those with tribal lineages, the marriage with people from outside the tribal system remained suspicious and almost impossible, notably for women.²³ However, many histories of (male) migrants who settled in Jeddah mention marriage with local women.²⁴ Thus, Burckhardt's 'mixed in one general mass' does, indeed, not just describe the adoption of Arab language and dress, but also this phenomenon. A Jiddawi colleague expressed it differently: 'We became one with them, they are one of us'. 'They' refers here to all those who settled in Jeddah, irrespective of the distinction between pilgrims and other settled migrants who were quietly included.

The Hajj as a Necessity: Religious Tourism

While hospitality certainly comes first where the pilgrimage is concerned, both in Jeddah and the holy cities, as well as in Saudi Arabia at

²¹ Victor Turner, 'The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religions*, 12 (1973), pp. 191–230. I am using Turner's notion without wanting to enter his argument about the contrast between the 'counterstructure' of *communitas* versus (political) structure. On this, see Robert Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 37–8.

²² Marcel Mauss, *Die Gabe: Form und Funktion des Austauschs in archaischen Gesellschaften*, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1st edn. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), vol. 743, pp. 157–62; cf. Anne Meneley, *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town*, Anthropological Horizons (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), vol. 9.

²³ Nadav Samin, 'Our Ancestors, Our Heroes: Saudi Tribal Campaigns to Suppress Historical Docudramas', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 41 (2014), pp. 266–86; Nadav Samin, *Of Sand or Soil*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 117–20.

²⁴ For an example of a trader of Egyptian origin resident in Massawa (and for some time in Jeddah), see Jonathan Miran and Aharon Layish, 'The Testamentary *Waqf* as an Instrument of Elite Consolidation in Early Twentieth-Century Massawa (Eritrea)', *Islamic Law and Society*, 25 (2018), pp. 78–120, here p. 93.

large, the pilgrimage was also a business. This idea is also present in numerous proverbs, as well as in current Saudi projections of future economic development, such as the Vision 2030, which was developed in 2016. Historically, the Hijaz was an essentially poor area and hence it was important to make good use of the *mausim*, the period of the hajj, in order to earn sufficient income to last for the remainder of the year. The saying *al-hajj ḥāja*, the hajj is a (pressing) need, reflects this double aspect of the hajj as a spiritual desire and a business.²⁵ Other proverbs are even more specific, for example ‘they brought them in as believers, and made them leave her [Mecca, the Hijaz] plucked’ (*adkhalūhum āminīn, wa-akhrajūhum mantūfīn*).²⁶ This economic approach is mirrored in laments found in many of the travelogues complaining about the local treatment of pilgrims and in particular of the irregular fees demanded from them, as well as the high prices for basic commodities.²⁷

This view of the hajj is also reflected in modern studies. ‘For all its dignity and nobility, sometimes the hajj seems like just another commodity or business venture, just another status symbol and pool of patronage,’ observes Bianquis, author of an important study on the pilgrimage.²⁸ While such an attitude might seem an utter contradiction to ‘the heart and soul of Islam’, it is not at all perceived as such by the local population. ‘How else’, I was asked when enquiring about the phenomenon, ‘could the pilgrimage be organised if the local economy did not benefit?’. In the present time, the Saudi state is adopting the same logic when trying to compensate for the

²⁵ For this saying and its interpretation, I am indebted to Dr. ‘Adnān al-Yāfi, Jeddah, March 22, 2006.

²⁶ Interview with ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh ‘Alī Riḍā, Jeddah, March 4, 2010.

²⁷ ‘Abdallāh Abkar, *Ṣuwar min turāth Makka al-Mukarrama fi ‘l-qarn al-rābi‘ ‘ashar al-hijrī* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān/Damaskus: Manār li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1425/2004); Aḥmad Maḥmūd, *Riḥalāt al-hajj*, Jamharat al-Riḥalāt, 3 vols. (Jeddah: al-Maṭba‘a al-Maḥmūdiyya, 1430/2009), vol. 1, p. 281 (voyage by Yaḥyā b. al-Muṭahhar b. Ismā‘il b. Yaḥyā al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥusnā, visit 1797), p. 305 (Muḥammad Ṣādiq Bāshā, visit 1880), and p. 295 (visit of Muḥammad b. Muṣṭafā Bayram V., visit 1840). The entire report by the Nawab of Bhopal in 1863 is permeated by complaints, see Sikandar Begum (Nawab of Bhopal), *A Princess’s Pilgrimage*, S. Lambert-Hurley (ed.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

²⁸ Bianchi, *Guests of God*, p. vii.