

MECCA: TORPEDO 3: CONTEMPORARY WRITTEN SOURCES

Q.If Mecca was a centre of influence, then do any of the other powers in the ancient Middle East mention Mecca? If so, when?

A. There is NO mention of Mecca in any documents until AD741 and it is not found on any maps until about 900AD.

The FIRST KNOWN COINS from Mecca is from AD822-823 during the reign of Al-Mamun.

- The earliest clear mention of Mecca that we have is from the *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica*. This is from AD 741 which states that *'Mecca, Abraham's house, as they [the Arabs] believe, which lies between Ur in Chaldea and Carras, a city in Mesopotamia, in a wasteland'*
- It is important to note that the word rendered 'Carras' is a Latin transcription of the Greek Carrhae which refers to Haran. This is where Abraham went according to Genesis 11:31) *"And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.*"
"Genesis 11:31 NKJV
- Therefore Abraham's house is located between Ur and Haran, not in the Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula.
- ***Thus the EARLIEST historically verifiable reference to Mecca places hundreds of miles away from modern day Mecca. This does not support the SIN***
- **822 and 823 we have first known coins from Mecca itself.** These were during the reign of Al-Mamun (813-833). They actually mention the name Mecca as the mint and this means that at that time, Mecca was a culturally significant place. But this begs the following question as stated by Volker Popp:
'How then did it come that this location suddenly emerged from out of nowhere' [p167]
- It is also known that Greek and Latin writers had written extensively about the South Arabians who supplied them with aromatic products, describing their cities, tribes and political organisations. They also wrote about Ethiopia and Adulis.
- *The political and ecclesiastical importance of Arabia in the 6th century was such that considerable attention was paid to Arabian affairs, too; but of Quraysh and their trading centre there is no mention at all, be it in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic or other literature composed outside Arabia before the conquests.*" [p134]

What do we know about the peoples of Ancient Arabia?

- **Archaeological evidence reveals much about kingdoms of Northern Arabia/Southern Jordan and of South Arabia(Yemen).**
- **There is VERY LITTLE about what is in the middle ie where Mecca is located.**
- **We have records for Medina (Yathrib) dating back to 6th century BC but NOTHING for Mecca before AD741**

DETAILS

North Arabia

- Prior to 6th century B.C, there is no archaeological evidence of civilisation in Arabia and there is no evidence of settlement at oases such as Jawf, Tayma and Dedan.
- This is consistent with Assyrian texts that refer to the Arabs as 'nomads'. The stela of the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III (737BC) mentions the tribe of Qedar, the name of one of the sons of Ishmael as listed in the Bible. They also mention Massaa and Tayma.
- Assyrian king Sargon II claims to have crushed the people of Thamud and deported them to Samaria.
- Ashurbanipal (668-627BC) claims to have defeated Iata who was 'king of Arabia'. This man then fled to the king of the Nabaiati (Nabateans). His records also mention the people of Qedar who appear to be a kingdom from the Sinai to the Negev.
- In 5th century, Herodotus talks of the 'Arabs' who inhabited the area from Gaza to Ienysus. Around the same time, we see an Aramaic inscription on a silver bowl from Egypt that mentions the king of Qedar who makes an offering to 'Ilat' or 'Allat' (the goddess in Arabic)
- The first mention of north Arabia in ancient written sources is from 312 BC when Diodorus refers to the Nabateans as a distinct people.
- By first century BC, Josephus says that the Nabateans lived in the area from the Euphrates to the Red Sea. According to him, they are descended from the tribes of Ishmael.

South Arabia

- From the earliest records, southern Arabia was known for its production of frankincense and myrrh. They formed the basis of the incense trade discussed above.
- The kingdoms of south Arabia produced the incense but the marketing and transport was done by the Nabateans as discussed above. They transported it to Gaza from South Arabia over a distance of 3400km. By Roman times, this market had grown to 3000 tons a year
- The earliest South Arabian kingdom we hear of is Saba (Sheba) with its capital in Ma'rib. Examination of sediments around this region suggests that irrigation there goes back to the 3rd millennium BC.
- From 6th century BC, they built a huge dam at Ma'rib to retain water that came down from seasonal rains in the mountains. It created a lake that serviced an irrigation system watering about 25,000 acres of land. Unfortunately, whenever the dam broke or failed, floods would occur, and people would need to flee the area.
- Like the Nabateans, the Sabeans also grew wealthy via the spice trade and they began to erect temples and fortified towns. By the 8th and 7th centuries BC, Assyrian records mention goods such as incense and precious stones from Saba
- By the 4th century BC, the kingdoms of the Minaeans, Qataban and the Hadramaut splintered off from Saba, and they also grew wealthy via the incense trade.
- 115 BC the Himyarite kingdom was founded and gradually annexed the surrounding kingdoms. They conquered Saba in 25BC, then Qataban in AD50 and Hadramaut in AD 100.
- From then until the 6th century AD, South Arabia was largely controlled by the Himyarites who continued to sell spices to the civilised world. This was such a lucrative business that the Romans called the Himyarite kingdom '*Arabia Felix*' or 'happy Arabia'
- The Nabateans allied themselves with the Himyarites to gain control of the incense trade. While the other kingdoms transported their goods by land, the Himyarites floated it to a nearby island and Nabatean boats picked it up to transport it up the Red Sea.

- Unfortunately for the Himyarites, the success of Christianity meant that the demand for incense plummeted and their prosperity declined.

Medina

- Medina was originally called Yathrib and was known as an oasis dating back to the 6th century BC. It is mentioned in the chronicles of Nabonidus.
- After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 Jewish refugees fled Roman lands going as far south as Yemen. Some settled in Yathrib
- Most of the archaeological remains in Yathrib from Pre-Islamic period consist of private fortifications maintained by individual communities who were constantly feuding with their neighbours. It is therefore highly unlikely that such a disparate group of settlers would have come together into some kind of economic cooperative with a central market.
- *'It is safe to conclude..that no less than Mecca, the Yathrib oasis was an economically insignificant and culturally isolated collection of small settlements. And again, like Mecca, Yathrib appears as an extremely unlikely context for the Quran, one that was simply not capable of producing or even comprehending such a rich and sophisticated collection of ancient religious traditions'* [Shoemaker, Steven, Creating the Quran, p113]

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CLAIM 3: ANCIENT SOURCES MENTION MECCA

The Samaritan Asatir

This has the following quote: *'All the sons of Neboioth reigned.. from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, and they built Mecca'*

Scholars dispute this as follows:

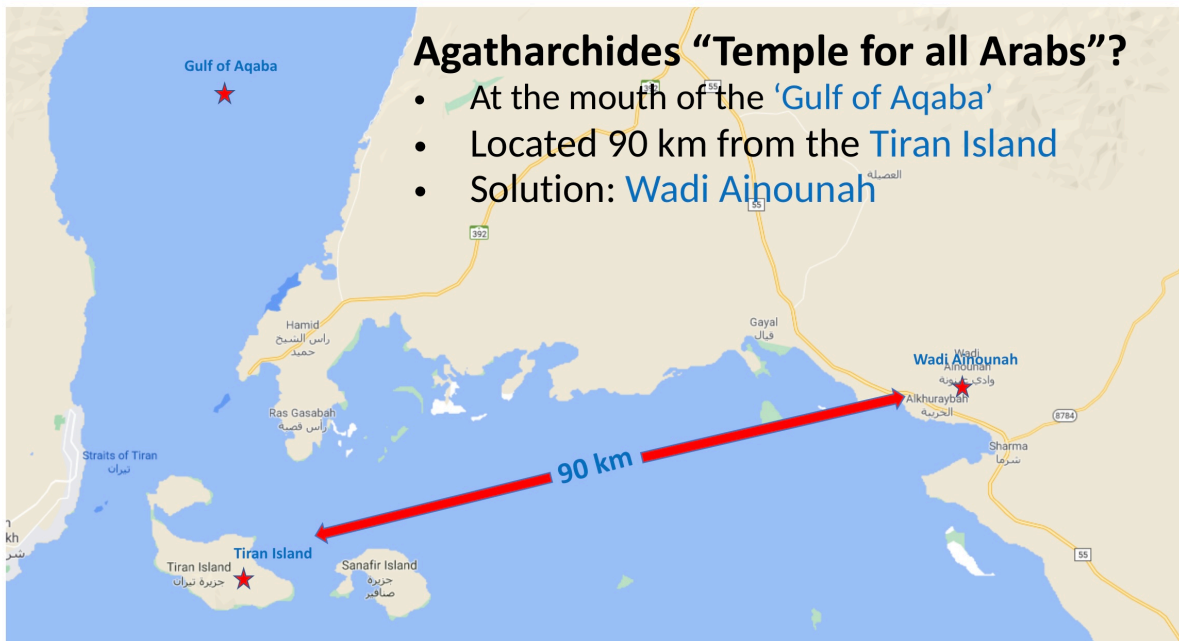
Ian D Morris suggests that the authors lived under Islamic rule because it includes conversations with Muslims as well as Jewish scholarship.

Ze'ev Ben-Hayyim and Christophe Bonnard propose range of dates from late 10th century to early 11th century.

So this document is unlikely to be a pre-Islamic reference to Mecca

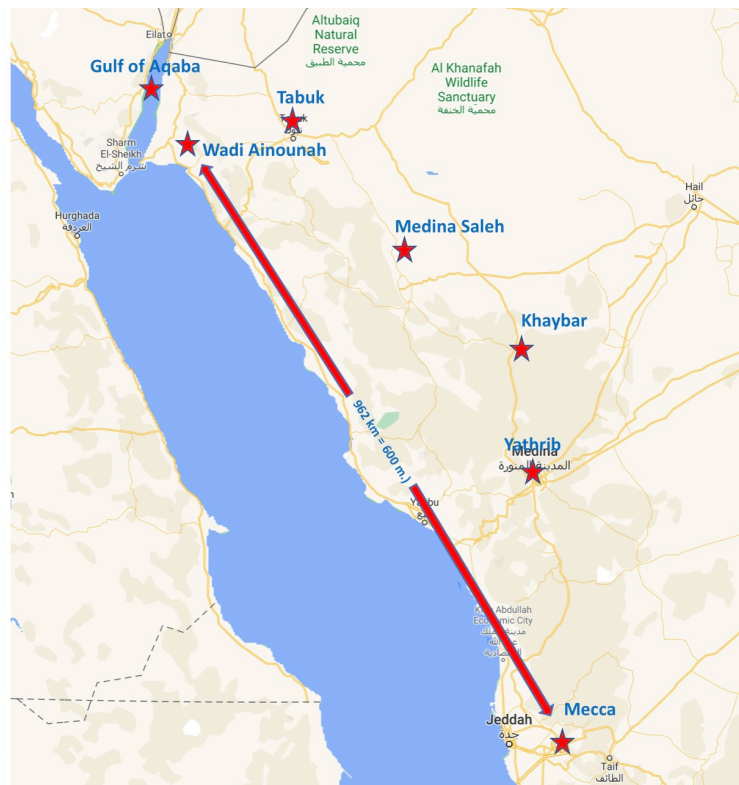
Diodorus

- According to Edward Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1788) the 1st century BC historian referenced "Mecca"
- In fact Diodorus was quoting Agatharchides (2nd century BC) who said that 'a very sacred temple has been established there which is highly revered by all the Arabs'. But what 'there' is Agatharchides talking about?
- He says that it is in a 'bay or gulf (kolpos), somewhere south of the gulf of Aqaba, that runs inland about 500 stadia. The mouth is too craggy for ships to traverse'
- 500 stadia is about 90km and the only temple that was known near the gulf of Aqaba was the temple of Wadi Ainounah



So, where is Wadi Ainounah in relation to Mecca?

- The Gulf of Aqaba, Tabuk, Medina Saleh, Khaybar, and Yathrib (now Medina) have been around since the 3rd century BC
- Wadi Ainounah was well known then, and still is today
- In the 3rd to 1st centuries BC, the only known Arabs would have lived up north, around the area of the Gulf of Aqaba
- But Mecca was not known at all back then, as it didn't exist!
- Now notice just how far Wadi Ainounah is from Mecca
- 962 km (597 m.)!
- That is 10 times further than the 90 km Agatharchides & Diodorus are referring to!



Conclusion: This proves that they were not referring to Mecca at all, but to a temple 600 miles further north!

- What about the phrase ‘highly revered by ALL the Arabs’? Remember that for those in the first and second centuries B.C, ‘Arabia’ meant ‘Arabia Petraea’ ie Syria, Israel and Jordan, NOT the Arabian peninsula.



- The only Arabs that Agatharchides and Diodorus would have known would have lived in these areas, and NOT modern day Mecca.
- Any temples that were revered by the Arabs would have been in these areas as well. Both Petra and Wadi Aynounah are in these areas.
- **Therefore the reference to a temple revered by ALL the Arabs is NOT a reference to Mecca.**

Don't the ancient historians Pliny and Ptolemy mention Mecca?

A. Neither Pliny's 'Portus Morchobae' or Ptolemy's 'Macoraba' are references to Mecca. Procopius of Caesarea makes no mention of Mecca

- Some Muslims claim that the following references from before the 8th Century actually refer to Mecca. But the evidence does not support this. In fact the sources are silent regarding Mecca. Patricia Crone states that this silence regarding Mecca is so '*striking and significant*' that attempts have been made to find Mecca and Quraysh in these contemporary authors. Scholars keen to 'read into' the sources mentions of Mecca have contended the following:
 1. Pliny's **Dabanegoris Regio** is really '**Dhu Bani Quraysh**' ie it indirectly mentions Quraysh
 2. Pliny's mention of '**Portus Morchobae**' is a reference to the '**port of Mecca**' ie Jeddah.
 3. Ptolemy mentions '**Macoraba**' which is really '**Mecca**'

Dabanegoris Regio

- This is mentioned by Pliny the Elder (dAD79). He himself relied on earlier studies of people who travelled around Northern Africa and Arabia eg Juba II (dAD23)
- He describes a place called Dabanegoris Regio and this was proposed by Herman von Wissman in 1970 to be the Dhu Bani Quraysh or the 'territory belonging to the Quraysh'
- There are 2 linguistic problems with this.
 1. To say that 'Dabanegoris Regio' =Dhu Bani Quraysh means that the Quraysh bit is NOT part of the root word but a declension. So if it really were the Region of the Quraysh it would be the Dananegos Regio. But the real name is DABANEGORIS REGIO, so it cannot be a mistranslation of Dhu Banu Quraysh.
 2. As Patricia Crone (Meccan Trade and Rise of Islam, 1987) notes, the word Quraysh is the name of a tribe, NOT a patriarch within a tribe, so the patronymic 'Sons of Quraysh' would not have made sense to people of the time.
- There are also Geographical problems . Crone notes that Pliny locates this region in **South Arabia** between Ommana and the Hadramat, describing the coastline on the **Persian Gulf**, NOT the Red Sea which would be the case if he were referring to the coast line near Mecca. Thus the language spoken would have been South Arabian or Sabaic and NOT Arabic.



- Pliny's mention of 'Portus Morchobae' is also in the same area so it cannot be Mecca. Most scholars also agree that Jedda did not reach any prominence until after the Arab conquest.

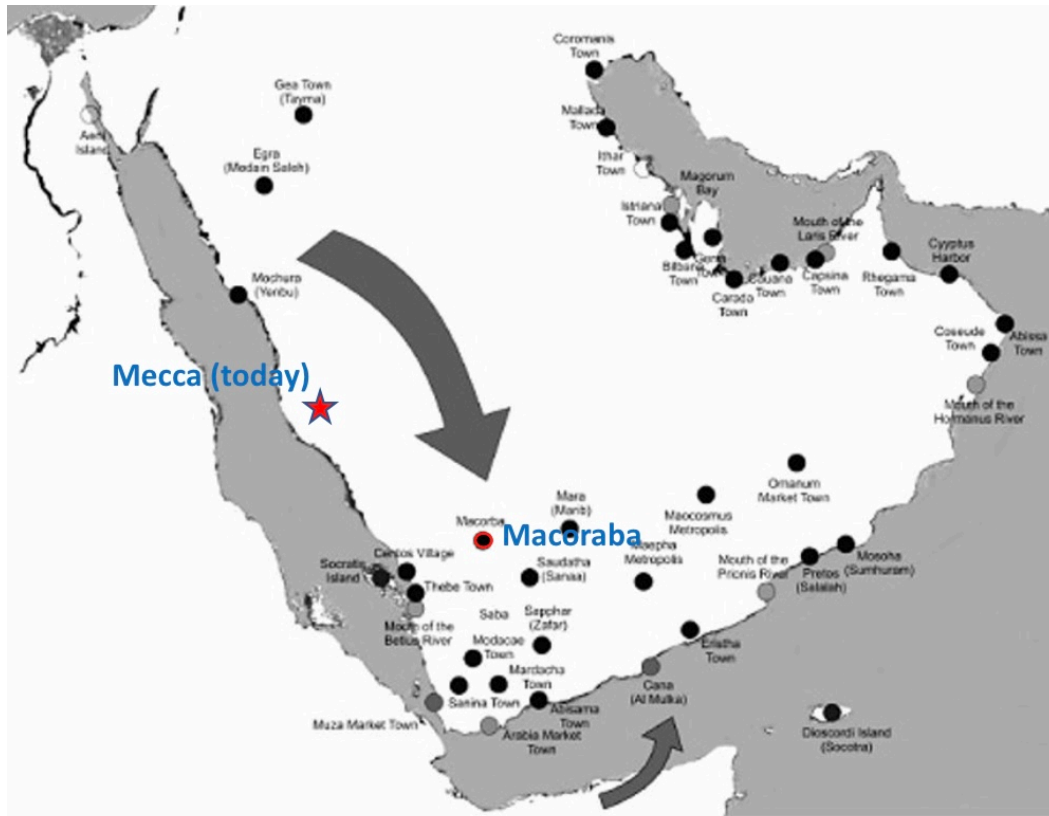
Macoraba

- Ptolemy (d170) wrote a 'Guide to Geography' and mentions a place called 'Macoraba'. Muslims claim that this is a reference to Mecca. Again there are both geographical and linguistic problems with this claim.
- Linguistic problems
 1. Regarding 'Macoraba', Crone notes that for this to be a reference to 'Mecca' it would need to mean something like 'Makka-Rabba' or 'Great Mecca'. The problem is that Arabic is a consonantal script and one cannot have words that are supposed to be the same, if the consonants are very different. [Note, I am not referring to synonyms here, I am referring to words that are allegedly derived from the same root]
 2. The word Mecca is the Arabic MKK and the word Macoraba would be the consonants MKRB or more probably KRB, with the 'm' being a grammatical addition to indicate 'place'. Even a child can see that KRB is very different from MKK.
 3. *'The plain truth is that the name of Macoraba has nothing to do with that of Mecca, and that the location indicated by Ptolemy for Macoraba in no way dictates identification of the two'* [p136]
- Geographical problems:
 1. Ptolemy's coordinates put Macoraba SOUTHEAST of Medina yet Mecca is SOUTHWEST of Medina
 2. There is a mention of 'Moka' by Ptolemy but this is in 'Arabia Petraea' ie Jordan and NOT the Hijaz
- Crone also notes that Pliny and Ptolemy were authors of the 1st and second centuries AD. If Mecca was an influential city in the 7th century, then more contemporary historians such as Procopius (AD 500-565) should have written about it.
- Crone then goes on to examine traditions that suggests that there was Meccan trade with Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, and Iraq and in each case shows that these traditions cannot be supported by the evidence available [p 138-148]
- The claim seems to have begun as follows:
 1. Ad 1651 French historian Samuel Bochart in AD1651 who claimed that Macoraba was Mecca.
 2. AD1739 Johann Heinrich included this supposed reference in his 'German Encyclopedia
 3. AD 1799 Konrad Mannert suggested that Macoraba referred to a temple
 4. AD 1864, German Albert Forbiger referenced Macoraba as Mecca in his encyclopaedia.
 5. AD 1890, Eduard Gasser suggested that 'Macoraba' was southern Arabian word for 'Mihrab' ie a place of worship.

- Archaeologist Dan Gibson has re-examined Ptolemy's maps using his references and compared them with the towns and rivers we know today. He notes that while Ptolemy correctly identified Muza, Aden and Cane, using Ptolemy's coordinates would put these places into the Arabian and Red Seas.



- This suggests that they underestimated the size of the Arabian Desert. By matching these rivers to rivers today, he came up with an alternative map for Arabia. Using this map, he suggests that Macoraba was actually in Yemen and is known as Al-Mahabisha today.



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- Ian D Morris from the University of Amsterdam says the following: *'It is telling that after 350 years of experimentation we have a handful of incompatible etymologies, none of which quite fits. It is also telling that 5 very different interpretations have resorted to languages that flourished outside ancient Mecca: Aramaic from Sprenger, Hebrew from Bochart and Dozy and old South Arabian from Glaser and Ali. Why then, is there still a consensus that Macoraba is Mecca? The idea was first noted in the 17th century; in the 18th century it found its way into encyclopaedias, and in the 19th, it was fairly common knowledge among orientalis. Konrad Mannert helped to popularise the idea, but it was*

probably Albert Folbigger's entry in Pauly's Encyclopaedia that assured its place in the canon of Oriental thought..It is not impossible that Mecca is Macoraba, but right now, given the state of the field, there is no rigorous way to bridge the two names. It is easier to conclude that they are different places. Patricia Crone seems to be vindicated"

In summary:

- The "Samaritan Asatir" that mentions Mecca is NOT pre Islamic but from 10th to 11th century AD
- Diodorus (1st century AD) mentions a sacred temple of the Arabs but this near the gulf of Aqaba, NOT in the Hijaz
- Pliny the Elder's mention of Dabanegoris (79AD) does not mean 'sons of Quraysh' and refers to a region on the EASTERN coast of Arabia not the Hijaz
- Ptolemy's Macoraba does not refer to Mecca in the Hijaz. The words are different roots in Arabic and Ptolemy's maps do not accurately reflect Arabia as it really is. What he called Macoraba is probably in what is today Yemen

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