

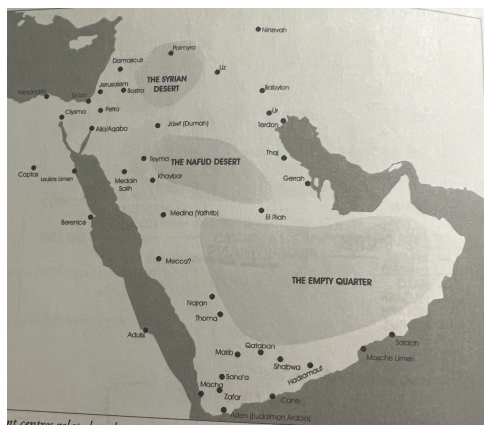
CLAIM: THE QURAN WAS REVEALED IN MECCA

Why does the Quran mention the people of Ad, Midian and Thamud so often and yet Mecca only 4 times? All 3 are in Northern Arabia or Jordan ie hundreds of km away.

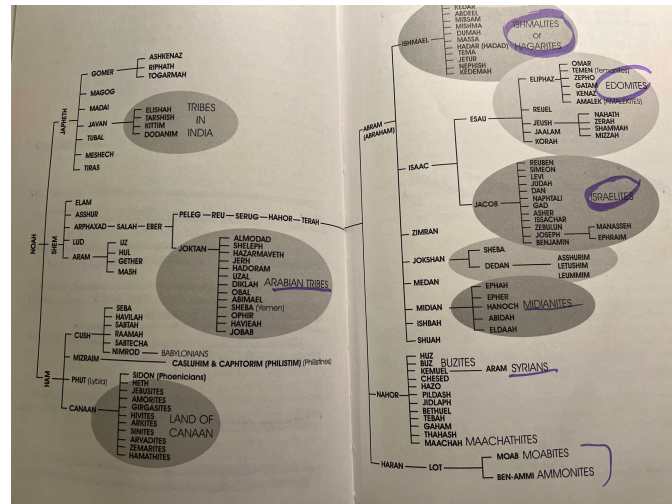
The most likely explanation is that the Quran was compiled in an area where these peoples would be familiar ie North Arabia or Jordan.

Geographical Background

- If the Quran was sent down to a ‘prophet’ who lived and worked in Mecca and Medina, then it is reasonable to expect that it talks about people and places nearby more than it would people and places far off. If Mecca was indeed the ‘holy city’ of the Arabs, then you would expect it to be mentioned by name many times. Is this what we find?
- The Quran does mention several places by name quite commonly:
 1. Ad- 23 times
 2. Thamud- 24 times
 3. Midian 7 times
- In contrast to these the Quran mentions the sites that are important to Islam much less frequently:
 - A. Medina 2 times
 - B. Valley of Mecca 1time
 - C. Valley of Bacca 1 time
- Quran mentions these places infrequently.
 - A. Tubb’a 2 times
 - B. Al-Ras 2 times
 - C. Hijr 1 time
- Let’s compare this with the New Testament, the revelation that the Quran supposedly superseded:.
 1. Gospel of Mathew: 31 locations, 108 references
 2. Mark: 26 locations, 79 references
 3. Luke: 31 locations, 110 references
 4. John 14 locations, 69 references
- So we see that the with the 4 Gospels combined there are 102 locations and 366 references. In contrast, the Quran mentions only 9 locations with 65 references
- Let’s look at where these places were in relation to each other and to Mecca. The following photo shows where the major geographical locations were in relation to each other



We have evidence for many of the people groups mentioned in the Biblical Account.



Looking at this table, several points can be made:

- A. The different peoples of the Middle East eg Ishmaelites, Temanites, Edomites, Amalekites, Midianites, Buzites, Syrians, Maachethites, Moabites and Ammonites were all closely related. Indeed, one may even refer to them as ‘cousins’
- B. The Temanites are mentioned in Assyrian records and may be associated with Teyma. Scholars believe that they settled further north and became the ancestors of the Arameans.
- C. Amalekites were a nomadic people who do not appear to have survived beyond the reign of Hezekiah
- D. Midianites are mentioned in the Bible and Babylonian writings. They were from southern Jordan/Northern Arabia
- E. Moabites were a kingdom to the east of the Dead Sea and south of the river Arnon. Its political power was ended after the Assyrian invasion of 733 BC and the area was later taken over by the Nabateans. We have archaeological evidence confirming their existence via the ‘Moabite stone’ dated to 9th century B.C.
- F. The Ammonites were also located east of the Dead Sea and their chief city was Rabbat Ammon, which is the modern city of Amman in Jordan.
- G. The Arabs saw themselves as the descendants of Shem. The southern Yemeni tribes claimed to come from Joktan and the northern Bedouin tribes from Ismael via Abraham.
- H. the two branches diverged from Eber, from whose name the term ‘Hebrew’ is derived
- I. The Ishmaelites were associated with the area north of the Nafud desert and most of their history is also associated with Jordan and Northern Saudi Arabi

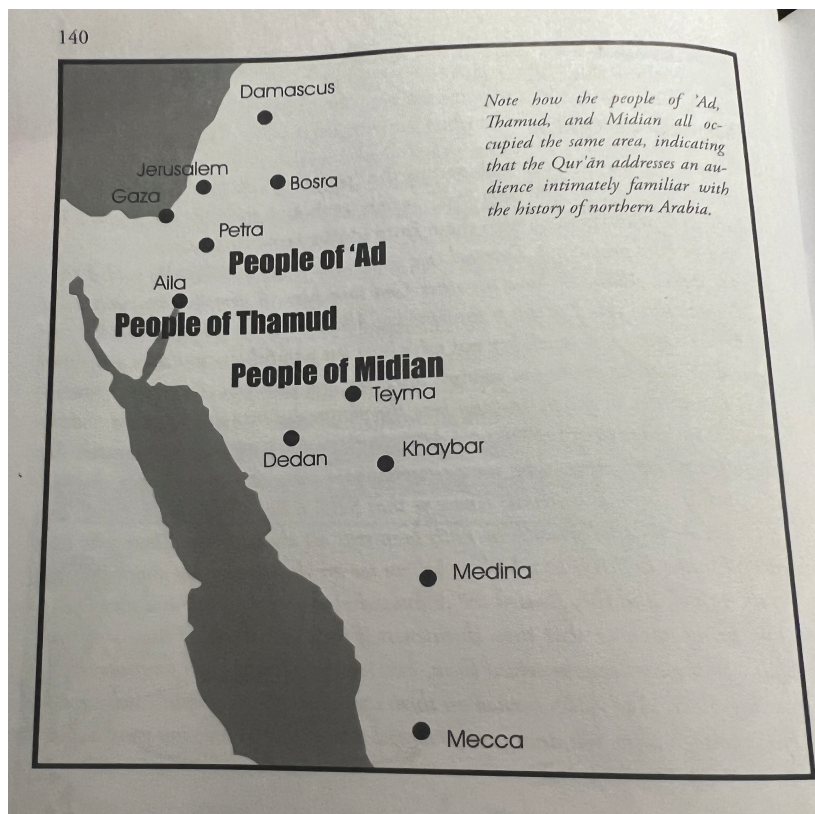
WHAT THE QURAN AND THE SIN CLAIM	WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SUGGEST	IS THE QURAN CONSISTENT WITH THE EVIDENCE	WHAT'S THE BEST EXPLANATION?
There were a people called 'Ad with whom the audience of the Quran were familiar	The people of 'Ad were actually the people of 'Uz referred to in the Bible. These were the Edomites who lived in Southern Jordan. There is no record of them going as far south as Mecca.	It doesn't explain why Quran would refer to a people that were more than a thousand km away	Quran was composed in North Arabia/ Southern Jordan. These people would have been familiar with the Edomites and the people of Ad
There were a people called Midian with whom the audience of the Quran were familiar	The people of Midian are the same Midianites referred to in the Bible. They also are from Southern Palestine/Jordan/North Arabia.	It doesn't explain why Quran would refer so often to a people that were so far away	Quran was composed in North Arabia/ Southern Jordan. These people would have been familiar with the Midianites
There were a people called Thamud with whom audience would be familiar	The people of Thamud are actually the Nabateans. They are well attested in ancient sources and were active throughout the Middle East. There is no record of them having settlements in the Hijaz	It doesn't explain why Quran would refer so often to people whose cities were 1000km away	Quran was composed in Southern Jordan/North Arabia. These people would have been familiar with the Nabateans
Mecca was the 'mother of all cities' and existed from the time of Adam and Eve	Although there is extensive archaeological evidence for kingdoms in North Arabia and South Arabia there is very little for the Hijaz. Medina is referred to as far back as 6th century BC but the FIRST reference to Mecca is in AD 741	No it is not	Mecca was simply not inhabited at the time the Quran was written.

CONCLUSION: WHERE WERE THE PEOPLE OF AD, THAMUD AND MIDIAN?
AS PER THE PHOTO BELOW, THEY WERE ALL FROM NORTH ARABIA

Note how the people of 'Ad, Thamud and Midian all occupied the same area, indicating that the Quran addresses an audience intimately familiar with the history of northern Arabia

'As we have shown, 'Ad came first, followed by Midian, and lastly Thamud. What made them notable? Each of these people united the tribes of Northern Arabia. Each of these people had influence on the kingdoms outside Arabia.'

DAN GIBSON, QURANIC GEOGRAPHY



Also not how far away these areas are from Medina and Mecca. It appears that the writer of the Quran wanted to allude to a time when Arabia was great and to suggest that Arabia could be great again. In the minds of the Quran's audience, there were 3 times in the past when Arabia was great:

1. When it was united under a tribal confederacy led by Edom who were known as the people of 'Ad.
2. The Midianites united the tribes and harassed the peoples to the north and west.
3. When the people of Thamud, known as the Nabateans were predominant.

All of this suggests that the writer of the Quran was addressing an audience in Northern Arabia as this was the area from which these peoples came. It is also the homeland of Ishmael (Paran).

The Quran mentions the people of Ad but it does NOT explain WHO they were or WHERE they lived

Examining the literary and archaeological evidence suggests that the people of Ad were the same as the people of Uz in the Bible, ie the Edomites.

- *In this section we have proposed that 'Ad is not unknown to historians but simply unrecognised because of the name, which over centuries has evolved from its original form to various pronunciations, differing from the Hebrew Uz to the Arabic Ad. On the other hand, the Egyptians gave them the name Hyksos, which further complicated the picture. When combined, we can recognise a huge area controlled by horse-riding nomads at a time when the horse was just beginning to be domesticated. Using the horse to gain superiority, these nomadic hordes poured out of Arabia..In Arabia, they were vaguely yet fondly remembered as the people of 'Ad who once made Arabia great"* [Gibson, Quranic Geography p115]

DETAILS

- The Quran (7:65-72, 11:50-60, 26:123-130, 89:6-14) mentions the people of 'Ad and their prophet HUD but it does NOT explain who these people were or where they lived. Indeed the Quran **assumes** that the reader is familiar with them
- The verses tell us that they built high places and monuments, as well as having mountain strongholds. They also had cattle, gardens and springs. As such, they must live in a mountainous country with lush valleys in between. This does not sound like the Hijaz.
- Analysis of Semitic languages suggests that the words 'Ad in Arabic and the Hebrew Uz (actually pronounced 'Utz') are very similar. It is noted that Arabic has no 'tz' sound so it is quite reasonable for them to turn substitute 'd' for 'tz' In Lamentations 4:21 we see that the land of Uz was where the Edomites dwelt. *"Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, You who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked."* Lamentations 4:21 NKJV
- A comparison of the Quran's description of 'Ad and the biblical description of Uz in the land of Edom reveals a number of parallels:
 1. Both were mountainous with high places
 2. Both had strongholds in rocky places
 3. Both had cattle, gardens, springs and deep valleys
 4. Like the temples of the people of 'Ad, the Edomite temples had many columns
- Gibson notes that Moses devotes a whole chapter of Genesis to the descendants of Esau ie Edom and he also theorises that the Edomites or the people of Uz once ruled a considerable amount of Northern Arabia. As such they would have at least been remembered by the people in Muhammad's time
- The traditional home of the descendants of Esau is Mount Seir, which is located in present day Jordan, between the Dead Sea and the gulf of Aqaba.
- Before Esau's descendants, a people called the Horites lived in this area. They were previously regarded as mythical but recent archaeological discoveries confirm that they did exist. They were a Bronze Age culture dwelling in cities.
- It is likely that the Edomites occupied the land and overthrew the Horites and established their kingdom. Gibson suggests that at its height, this empire stretched

from the Euphrates in the East to the Nile Delta in the West. They became known as the people of 'Ad in the Quran.

- He notes that the Egyptians record an invasion of Egypt by a horde of 'shepherd kings' around 1650 BC known as the Hyksos who came from Arabia. The historian Josephus called them 'Arabs', and most scholars agree that they were from the Levant. Artefacts mentioning the Hyksos pharaoh Khian have been found in lands as far away as Crete and Baghdad. This suggests that these rulers at one point in time controlled a large swathe of land.
- They were called 'Asiatics', 'Barbarians', 'Arabians', 'Phoenicians' in monuments and by ancient historians. They were said to worship 'Seth' or 'Sutekh' who was the Egyptian equivalent of the Syrian 'Baal'. They used horses extensively in warfare
- Gibson theorises that these Hyksos were in fact the Edomites known in the Quran as the people of Ad. They ruled in Egypt for about 100 years and were driven out by 1550BC and settled in what is now Jordan.
- He notes that in the rock city of Petra there is a passage way called '*Khaznet Fir'aun*' (Treasury of Pharaoh) and '*Qasr bint Fir'aun*' (Palace of Pharaoh's daughter). The obvious question is WHY these areas should be given names related to Egyptian pharaohs **unless** at one point, the ancestors of the builders of Petra **were actually Pharaohs**.
- Thus he views Edom as a kingdom of importance who at one time had ruled much of Palestine and Egypt. He notes that Ezekiel 32:17-32 describes the 'famous nations' of his day and Edom is mentioned in v29.

Hyksos	Edomites	Ad
Named by the Egyptians	Named by the Hebrews as Edom in the land of 'Uz	Named after the land of 'Ad
Empire existed 200-300 years before exodus	Kingdom 200-300 years before Exodus	Existed in long-forgotten Arabian history
Empire from south Canaan to Euphrates	Edomite kingdom was from southern part of Canaan and reached Euphrates	Brought about union of Arabian peninsula
Were Semitic	Were Semitic	Were Semitic
Had horses and used horses in war	Had horses and describe use of horse in battle	Had horses
Were shepherds	Were shepherds and nomadic in origin	Were shepherd nomads
Linked with Arabians	Inter-related with Arabians. One of Esau's wives was daughter of Ishmael	Linked with Arabians
Called Barbarians by Egyptians	Were not settled or cultured like Egyptians	Quran mentions Pharaohin relation to them
Adopted Egyptian lifestyle	Cut temples from rock	Cut out great temples
Worshipped Sutekh or Baal	Drifted from worship of Yahweh to Baal	Were called from polytheism to monotheism by prophet Hud

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The Quran mentions the 'People of Midian' but again gives no clarifying details.

Examination of the Bible, Quran and archaeology suggests that there was a people of Midian but that they were in Southern Palestine or Jordan, NOT around Mecca or Medina. Indeed, the Quran speaks as if it's listeners would be familiar with them and their history. This suggests that the writer of the Quran was speaking to an audience that was likely in Northern Arabia/Southern Jordan, NOT in the Hijaz.

Details

Midian in the Bible

- The Biblical account says that the Midianites are descended from Midian, the son of Abraham by Keturah.
- Moses fled from Pharaoh to the land of Midian and God spoke to him at Mount Horeb. It is highly unlikely that Moses as one man could have walked a distance of 1300 km from Egypt to say even Medina. Midian must have been just across the Sinai peninsula in Southern Jordan. Even the distance from Egypt to modern day Mt Horeb in Saudi Arabia was only 570km in comparison and the distance to Aqaba in Jordan is only 454km.
- During the Exodus, the Israelites enter the land of Midian and fight with them.
- While it is unclear exactly where this land was, it appears to have been east of the Dead Sea. Numbers 31 tells of the children of Israel taking vengeance on the Midianites and then took the spoils back to the plains of Moab 'by the Jordan, east of Jericho' (Numbers 31:12). It also describes a large amount of booty.
- This means that Midian must have been fairly close to Moab to the East of the Jordan. Gibson proposes that the Midianites would have been living near Wadi Sirhan which is a lowland that collects enough run off to sustain large numbers of sheep and cattle.
- This is in the extreme northwest of modern day Saudi Arabia, close to the border with Jordan and a long way from the Hijaz.
- We then see Midian referred to in Judges 6-8 with the story of Gideon. Again this suggests that the Midianites were a neighbouring people. Interestingly, Judges 8:21 tells of Gideon defeating the Midianites kings Zebah and Zalmunna and taking away crescent-shaped ornaments that the Midianites wore on their camel's necks.
"So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks."
 Judges 8:21 NKJV

- Gluek describes the Midianites in 'The River Jordan' as follows: *'the Midianites and other Bedouins were wont at harvest time to make rapid raids across the Jordan, carry off the crops of Israel from the very threshing floors, and drive off whatever livestock they could lay their hands on. The struggle between the Desert and the Sown is continuous. Hungry nomads have ever pressed into ploughed lands, content to take by swift violence what others have gained by hard toil'*
- All of this suggests that the Midianites were a people that were CLOSE TO PALESTINE. They would not have been in contact with the people of the Hijaz.

Midian in the Quran

- Sura 28:20-28 mentions Midian in describing Moses fleeing there from Egypt
- Sura 7: 85-83 mentions Midian and 'their brother, Shueyb' who was apparently a prophet that Allah sent. It gives no hint of when it occurred, nor where it occurred.
- Sura 11:84-95 again mentions Midian and Shueyb and says that the 'folk of Lot are not far off from you'. The folk of Lot dwelt near Sodom and Gomorrah which is around the Dead Sea, NOT the Hijaz.
- Surah 22:42-45 mentions the peoples of Ad, Thamud, 'the folk of Lot' and 'the dwellers in Midian'
- Surah 28:43-47 mentions Moses dwelling in Midian
- Surah 29:36 again mentions Allah sending 'Shueyb, their brother' to Midian

Archaeology and the Midianites

- For much of their history, the people of Midian were nomads, which means that they would not have lived in settlements. This means there is little archaeological evidence apart from pottery.
- Midianite pottery has been found as far south as Tayma (Bawden, 1983) and this may have been their southernmost point. Their northern most point was likely Wadi Sirhan which makes them a people of Northern Arabia/Southern Jordan
- Although the Hadith do not mention them, the Quran speaks of them as if the listeners were familiar with them and their history. This means that the writer of the Quran was speaking to an audience that was likely in Northern Arabia/Southern Jordan, NOT the Hijaz.

The Quran mentions the 'people of Thamud' again without clearly identifying.

Examination of the evidence, both inside and outside the SIN suggests that the people of Thamud were those who came after the people of Ad. They were what we call the NABATEANS. These were a people who were active from Yemen to the Mediterranean and even into Persian controlled lands. Despite this reach, their political and religious centres were AGAIN in Southern Jordan/North Arabia (Petra, Medain Salih) and NOT south around Mecca and Medina

DETAILS

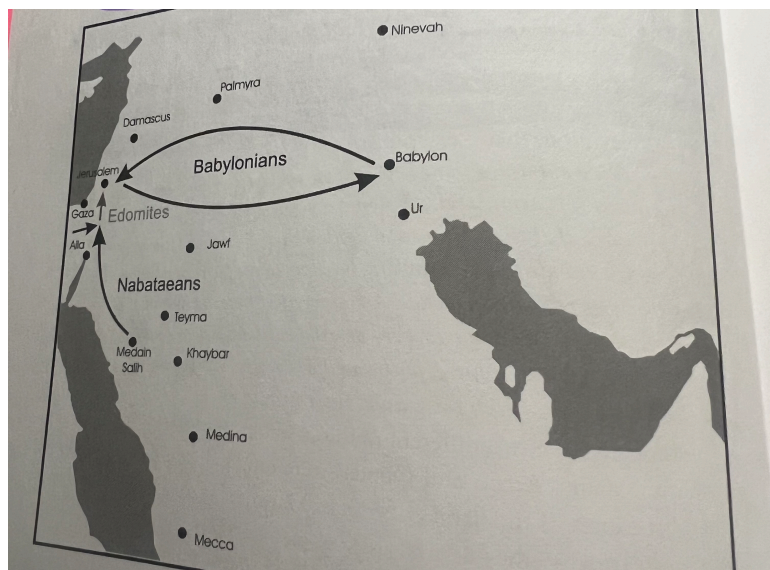
- The word 'Thamud' has no meaning in Arabic but it can be broken up into 'tham' and 'ud'. Arabic allows the prefix 'thum' or 'thuma' to mean 'thereupon, thereafter'. So one possible meaning of 'Thamud' is 'the people who came after Ud'

- Several Hadith mention the people of Thamud as living in al-Hijr or what is today Medain Salih, a city northern Arabia. In pre Islamic times, the outside world called the people of this city **Nabateans**.

Who were The Nabateans?

- They were a nomadic people who originally lived in tents but were very active in the incense trade from Yemen to the Mediterranean. They were nomadic in the Negev and Sinai peninsula.
- As a result of this trade, they became wealthy and began to build cities and bury their dead in ritual tombs. They also left behind many inscriptions. Petra is a good example of such a city. We see similar tombs in Medain Salih, further evidence of its Nabatean origins.
- There were 5 Nabatean burial cities: 3 in the Negev/Sinai, Petra in 'Edom' or Jordan and Meda'in Salih (Al-Hijr)
- These cities were also located on the junctions of major trade routes allowing the inhabitants to accumulate wealth.
- Indeed, Petra has several temples, a theatre, a bathhouse, pools and other public buildings. Such a centre would have required hundreds, if not several thousand people to maintain it.
- Before them, there was a people called Lihyanites who are mentioned in a Nabatean inscriptions
- The ancient historian Diodorus describes the Nabateans in 'Bibliotheca Historica' and mentions the oasis of Feiran near the Red Sea. Gibson believes that Feiran corresponds to the Biblical 'Paran'. The gulf around this oasis became known as the Laeanites (Lihyanites).
- In his account, Diodorus states:
'After one has sailed past this country, the Laenites gulf comes next, about which are many inhabited villages of Arabs who are known as Nabateans. This tribe occupies a large part of the coast and not a little of the country which stretches inland, and has a people beyond telling and flocks and herds in multitudes beyond belief. Now in ancient times these men observed justice and were content with the food which they received from their flocks, but later, after the kings of Alexandria had made the ways of the sea navigable for their merchants, these Arabs not only attacked the shipwrecked, but fitting out pirate ships preyed upon the voyagers imitating in their practice the savage and lawless ways of the Tauri of the Pontus. Some time afterwards, however, they were caught on the high seas but some quadriremes and were punished...
...(the Nabateans) lead a life of brigandage and overrunning a large part of the neighboring territory they pillaged it. Some had penetrated to the Mediterranean coast where they indulged in piracy, profitably attacking the merchant ships of Ptolemaic Egypt
- Based on the references 'Alexandrian' and 'Quadriremes' this period was between 300BC and 146 BC.
- The area controlled by the Nabateans would have included the area formerly controlled by the Edomites and Diodorus notes that they occupied the Sinai and the area from the Mediterranean coast all the way to the Negev desert.
- This occurred because of the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of the Israelites by Nebuchadnezzar between 605-587BC. The vacant lands were attractive to the Edomites who moved north and west into them. This left their previous lands unoccupied and the Nabateans moved into them from Meda'in Salih.[*this is represented on the map below*]

- Thus they would have come 'after Edom' or 'after Uz' or 'after Ad' and be known in the Quran as 'Thamud'. To the rest of the world however, they were known as 'Arabs' or 'Nabateans'.
- Indeed, the Jewish historian Josephus states that Nabateans lived at Meda'in Salih and their lineage went back to Nabiaoth, the eldest son of Ishmael. He also states that the Nabateans controlled all of the desert trade.
- In order to develop such an extensive trade network, they had to become proficient at navigating via the stars and providing water via hidden cisterns. They also developed their own writing system. Scholars now believe that they wrote in both the Nabatean and Safaitic scripts. Indeed, Diodorus notes that they left *'signals, which are known to themselves but not understood by anyone else'*
- During the last 3 centuries BC, the Nabateans gained control of the 3 major trade routes in the area. In turn it made them very wealthy.
 1. The incense trade from southern Yemen to Alexandria and Gaza. The Nabateans dominated this and it became very profitable with the rise of the Roman Empire.
 2. The overland trade route from the Orient over the mountains of Central Asia and Northern Mesopotamia to Damascus. This later became the 'Silk Road'. By 85BC, the Nabateans took control of Damascus and thus gained control of this trade route as well. We also see that by 300 AD there were Arab and Persian settlements in Ceylon. Indeed, Chinese records from Tseng mention 'Rekem' which is the Nabatean name for PETRA (which was the name given to the city by the Romans)
 3. The Maritime trade route from the north end of the Red Sea. By 245BC, Nabatean boats were collecting incense from Yemen and delivering it to northern ports.



The Nabatean Golden Age

- With money flowing in from all their trade and commercial activities, the Nabatean culture became more affluent with horses replacing camels, Roman togas and Greek names replacing Arab ones. They also began to build large cities cut out of the faces of mountains.

- These included Petra in Jordan, Bosra in Syria, Avdat and Shivta in the Negev and Medain Salih in Saudi Arabia. It is believed that these cities originally began as burial cities with residents dwelling in tents. Over time, the number of people living there grew and houses were constructed.
- This 'golden age' existed from about 100 BC to 100AD. During this time, the words 'Nabatean' and 'Arab' were somewhat interchangeable.
- *'At the height of its power, Nabatea stretched from Damascus southward into Northern Arabia. It was bordered on the west by Roman-held lands comprised of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Parada, the Decapolis and by Egypt. The Nabatean's eastern border, being in the desert was undefined but could be said to stretch into the borders of Parthia'* [p176]

The End of the Nabatean Kingdom and Roman Rule

- During their golden age, the Nabateans controlled the flow of massive amounts of incense into the Roman Empire, which was used in their pagan rituals. Not surprisingly, the Romans became interested in gaining control of the source of this incense and began to send troops to Southern Arabia.
- A further development was the rebellion in the neighbouring Roman province of Judea in AD 70. Roman legions then arrived on the doorstep of the Nabateans.
- The Nabateans then made an alliance with the Romans and Josephus records them sending Titus both infantry and cavalry to aid in the destruction of Jerusalem.
- The last Nabatean king was Rabbel II (AD 70-106) and at the end of his reign the Romans annexed the Nabatean kingdom as the province of 'Arabia'. It was done by the Legate Cornelius Palma on behalf of the Emperor Trajan. Not surprisingly, Palma renamed the city of Tadmur after himself, Palmyra.
- This process is clearly described on Roman coins of the time that say 'Arabia Adquista' ie 'Arabia Acquired' rather than 'Arabia Captured'.
- From there, Claudius Severus built a paved road linking Bosra with the port of Aila at Aqaba. It was 500 km in length and called the *Via Nova Traiana* (New Road of Trajan). Trajan then made Bosra the capital and called it *Nea Traiana Bostra*.
- The Emperor Hadrian then renamed Petra *Petra Hadriane*.
- By the 3rd century, the city of Palmyra had become the centre of a powerful Arab kingdom and in 260AD helped the Romans repel the invasion of Syria by the Sassanian Persians.

Byzantine Times

- By 330, Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire and the Emperor Constantine the Great transferred the capital to Byzantium, renaming it Constantinople.
- By this time there was a Christian community in Syria and Petra. Some had suffered under the persecution of Diocletian and by the mid 4th century, the Bishop Asterias of Petra was named as a participant in the Arian controversy.
- In 431 the council of Ephesus condemned the Bishop Nestorius as a heretic and he was 'exiled' to Petra.
- Unfortunately, the area was prone to earthquakes and we have records of such events in AD 363, AD 551 and AD 713. Although the city continued to be occupied during the 5th and 6th centuries, and priests and bishops remained there. After the final one the city was never rebuilt

Thamud in the Quran and Hadith

- Sura 7:73-79 and 11:61-68, 26:14'-159, 27:25 mentions the people of Thamud who were sent 'their brother Salih' as a prophet. It also mentions the 'camel of Allah' and that 'the earthquake seized them'.
- This is quite consistent with what we know of the Nabateans: they began as camel traders and were destroyed by earthquakes. This suggests that the audience to whom the preacher of the Quran was talking to were familiar with the Nabateans.
- There is also a carving of a camel carved into a mountainside about 50km south of Petra and 15km north of Wadi Rum. The top of the carving rises 5m above the canyon floor.
- Bukhari 4.562 mentions *'the people landed at the land of Thamud called Al-Hijr along with Allah's apostle and they water from its well for drinking and kneading the dough with it as well'*
- Bukhari 5.638 has Muhammad saying *'If I should be present at their time I would kill them as the nations of Thamud were killed'*

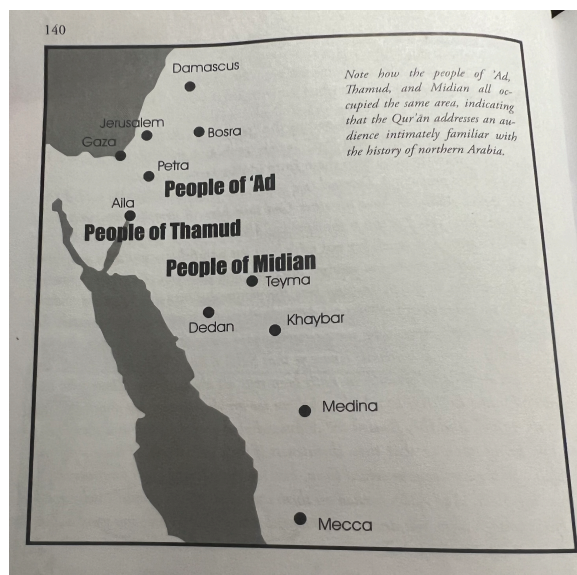
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Also not how far away these areas are from Medina and Mecca. It appears that the writer of the Quran wanted to allude to a time when Arabia was great and to suggest that Arabia could be great again. In the minds of the Quran's audience, there were 3 times in the past when Arabia was great:

1. When it was united under a tribal confederacy led by Edom who were known as the people of 'Ad.
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All of this suggests that the writer of the Quran was addressing an audience in Northern Arabia as this was the area from which these peoples came. It is also the homeland of Ishmael (Paran).

CLAIM: THE 'HOLY CITY' REFERRED TO IN THE ISLAMIC SOURCES WAS MECCA

The Islamic sources tell us several things about the 'Holy City'

It's in a valley

It has mountains

It has a high side and a low side with a back way into the city through a canyon.

But is any of this true?

Mecca is in a valley?

- Bukhari 3:891 and Quran 48:24 refer to the 'valley of Mecca'.
- Bukhari 4:583 says that Abraham took Hagar to a valley beside the Ka'ba and near the 'spot of Zam-zam' before he cast her out. The same Hadith says that there was a 'thaniya' or crack in the rock where Abraham faced the Ka'ba.
- Bukhari 2:685 says that while Muhammad would run between Mount Safa and Mount Marwa he would run in the midst of a 'rain water passage'.
- So Mecca was in a large valley and beside the Ka'ba there was stream.
- Modern day Mecca quite different:
 1. It is not in a valley. The nearest 'Wadi' is about 15km away from the Ka'ba.

2. The wadi is dry throughout the year and the only time there is water in it is during seasonal rains in the mountains.
3. In ancient times there was NO natural flow of water through the village of Mecca.

Are there mountains around Mecca?

- Ibn Ishaq records the story of an elephant from Yemen that damaged the Ka'ba. He says that there were mountains near the holy city where people could look down and see what the elephant was allegedly doing.
- The problem with this is that Mecca is in a large open area with low rocky mountains rising out the sand. Effectively it is flat with barren rocks rising from the desert floor. The nearest proper mountains are more than 3km away. How could you see an elephant from this distance?
- There is a small outcropping with a gradual slope to the top that is half a kilometre away from the Ka'ba. This can hardly be called a mountain and there are no recorded fortifications on this area.

What about Mount Safa and Mount Marwa?

- Islamic sources have a lot to say about two mountains, Safa and Marwa:
4. Muhammad climbed Mt Safa high enough so he could look down upon the Ka'ba (Sunan Abu Dawood, 750)
 5. Muhammad said that part of the Haj was to RUN between Mt Safa and Mt Marwa (Abu Dawood, 727)
 6. Muhammad would run in the midst of a water passage when passing between Mt Safa and Mt Marwa (Al Bukhari 2:685)
- The SIN says that this ritual is based on the story of how when Hagar was put away by Abraham she wandered between mountains to look for water for her baby Ishmael.
- J. Bukhari 4:583-4 says that Hagar climbed Mt Safa to look for help and could see no one. She then descended and crossed a valley and then climbed Mt Marwa looking for help but found none. She repeated this 7 times.
 - K. Fiqh-us-Sunday 5:85 also says that she climbed Mt Safa, then climbed down to reach the valley. She then 'struggled hard, crossed the valley and reached Marwa'
 - L. Bukhari 6:495 says that Mt Safa was high enough so that when Muhammad climbed it, he was able so see approaching cavalry.
 - M. There were idols or places of worship set up on Mt Safa and Marwa (Fiqu-us-Sunna 5:86, Ibn Ishaq 56, p30).
 - N. The trip between the two mountains was strenuous enough that some people could not complete the 7 crossings in one day (Fiqu-us-Sunna 5:88)
 - O. There was a gate through which Muhammad approached Mt Safa (Fiqu-us-Sunday 5:90).
- Let's look at what the EVIDENCE tells us about the real Safa and Marwa in Mecca today:
- P. Mt Safa and Marwa are totally enclosed in the Mosque complex. There is no valley between them. Pilgrims walk between them along a corridor.
 - Q. They are only 450 metres apart and the total distance for 7 trips between them would only be 3.6km.
 - R. Today Safa is only about 8meters tall.
 - S. There is no evidence of any idol bases, inscriptions nor any gate at these 'mountains'

Mecca is described as having a high and low side, and a road from either side

- Various Islamic Sources talk about Mecca having a high and low side:
- 7. Bukhari 2:645 says that Muhammad used to enter Mecca from a high 'thaniya' and leave it from a low 'Thaniya'. He repeats in 2:647 that Muhammad entered from its 'higher side' and left from its 'lower side'
- 8. Bukhari 3:891 confirms that A thaniya is a narrow mountain pass
- 9. Bukhari 2:815 says that the narrator met the prophet *'when he was ascending the heights towards Mecca and I was descending'*
- 10. Bukhari 2:820 says that Ibn Umar would spend the night between the two thaniyas and that he too would *'enter Mecca through the thaniya which is at the higher region of Mecca'*
- 11. Bukhari 4:227 narrates that the prophet waited for a certain individual at the *'higher region of Mecca'*
- 12. Bukhari 4:231 says that on the day he conquered Mecca, Muhammad entered through *'it's higher region'*
- 13. Ishaq 148,102 says that Zayd had to *'withdraw to the upper part of Mecca, and he stopped in the mountain of Hira facing the town'*

• What does the Evidence tell us?

- 14. Mecca is in a large open area with low rocky 'mountains' rising from the sand.
- 15. The area is relatively level and Mecca has no high or low side.
- 16. There are no 'narrow mountain passes' through which one approaches Mecca.
- 17. Mt Hira is a considerable distance from the Ka'ba and not located in Mecca
- Gibson's conclusion is reasonable: *'thus it is my belief that the early descriptions of Mecca and its mountains do not fit the Mecca of today'* [p232]

A back way into the holy city?

- Al-Tabari VIII 1531 p71-73 talks of Mecca being approached by a *'rough and rugged path among canyons'*. He further describes *'Al-Murar pass to the descent of al-Hudabiya below Mecca'*
- This is not consistent with Mecca which lies in an open flat area that can be approached from various angles.
- Scholars have never been able to identify the 'Al-Murar' and 'the descent of Hudabiya'

The Sacred City was marked out by large stones

- Ibn Ishaq talks about boundary stones beside Mt Arafat at the sacred city
- In today's Mecca the distance from the Ka'ba to Mt Arafat is about 18km. Small boundary stones would have been buried by desert sands so large stones would have been needed. There is no evidence of such stones.

Conclusion: None of the features of the Holy City in the Islamic sources fit Mecca

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE QURAN

[From Creating the Quran, Stephen Shoemaker]

- What we know about the Hijaz does not fit very well with the production of a text like the Quran. As shown by Patricia Crone and others it is highly unlikely that Mecca was a major trading centre in 7th century.
- Quran has much to say about Jews. Although there were Jewish settlements in North Arabia and Yemen, they appear to be completely unaware of any Jewish community in Medina or Mecca.
- Quran has much to say about Christians. By 7th century, Christianity literally surrounded the Hijaz but there is no evidence of any Christian community there.
- Shoemaker also discusses how later Muslim exegetes had great difficulty understanding Surat Quraysh. Patricia Crone analysed this Sura and stated that 'the exegetes had no better knowledge of what this Sura meant than we have today.. the original meaning of these verses was unknown to them'.
- She suggests that they represent traditions that predated the Quran and that the uncertainty of the exegetes makes sense 'if at least part of the text was old when Muslims first came across it'.
- The Quran is regularly unintelligible. *"The Koran claims for itself that it is 'mubeen' or 'clear'. But if you look at it, you will notice that every 5th sentence or so simply doesn't make sense. Many Muslims-and Orientalists- will tell you otherwise, but the fact is that a fifth of the Quran is just incomprehensible"* **Gerd Puin**. This is echoed by **Gerald Hawting** also states that the text if taken on its own is completely unintelligible, filled with 'grammatical and logical discontinuities'

Much of Quran is NOT consistent with production in Hijaz

- The Quran has a great deal of Christian content which would only have made sense to an audience familiar with Christianity.
- There was NO Christian presence in the Hijaz of 7th century so this material must have come from somewhere else: most likely North Arabia or Jordan.
- Quran talks about seafaring in a way that suggests audience is familiar with it yet Mecca and Medina are more than 100km from the Red Sea in the middle of a desert. Chap 7:163-166 talks about people breaking the SABBATH by FISHING. There were no Jew in Mecca so why mention it? Unless the Quran was actually compiled in an area where there were Jews and fishing.
- *"Well over a century ago, Charles Cutler Torrey noted that 'the references to sailing and the sea are both numerous and vivid' to such an extent that one would almost assume Muhammad himself must have been frequently out to sea"* [Shoemaker, p239]
- David Waines and Crone show that Agriculture and vegetation figure prominently in the Quran, revealing how significant they were in the area where it was revealed. It talks about the *mushrikun* or 'associators' as cultivating grain and grapes (36:33-34) as well as making offerings from sheep goats, camels and oxen (6:136-45). They raised horses, mules and donkeys as beasts of burden (16:8)
- Crone notes that while it would have been theoretically possible to grow pomegranates, date palms and grapes [in the Hijaz], cultivating grain and olives would have been impossible. She notes that Olives require a winter chill to flower and fruit and this is why they are adapted to Mediterranean lands'
- "In any case, it seems clear that these Qur'anic traditions must have been composed in conditions where the economy and climate were quite different from what they were in Mecca or really anywhere in the central Hijaz. We should expect to find a home for them elsewhere, somewhere by the sea where grain and olives grew in abundance and there

was ample pastureland for herds of livestock, in a landscape that could support the cultivation of “diverse produce.” [p241]

- One should add that the Qur'an also refers to the story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah in terms that clearly suggest its composition somewhere well outside the Hijaz. In 37:133–38, the Qur'an reminds its audience that day-by-day they pass by these places, Sodom and Gomorrah, in the morning and in the night. So, too, Qur'an 11:89 says that those hearing its words were living not far from where the people of Lot once dwelled. Yet these locations are not anywhere near Mecca or Yathrib: as Crone rightly observes, “One would not have guessed from this remark that the Meccans had to travel some eight hundred miles to see the remains in question.”³⁸ Sodom was widely believed to have been in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, and so this part of the Qur'an was, apparently, composed to address people living near the traditional sites of Sodom and Gomorrah, presumably somewhere in greater Palestine. These passages therefore assume both a location and “landscape of memory” for the Qur'an's audience that appears focused, at least in these instances, on the Holy Lands of the biblical tradition.³⁹ The lands in question, surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah, for what it is worth, are said by the Bible to be well-watered and fertile, like the Garden of Eden or the land of Egypt (Gen. 13:10).“
- Furthermore, the Qur'an's regular employ of a large number of foreign terms, more than three hundred, borrowed from dozens of ancient languages, also must inform our search for the Qur'an's context. The most important catalog of these Qur'anic loan words remains Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, published in 1938, which is a masterpiece of Semitic philology.⁴² Some of the words identified by Jeffery, to be sure, and especially those taken from South Arabian or Syriac may have already permeated the Arabic vocabulary before Muhammad began his mission. Nevertheless, in any instances where such judgments regarding the history of the Arabic lexicon have been reached on the basis of comparison with “pre-Islamic” poetry, we should certainly set these to the side, since we cannot presume that the verbiage of this corpus accurately reflects the language of pre-Islamic Arabic. The bulk of these foreign terms have been adopted from Aramaic, including especially Syriac, as well as Hebrew, which together account for more than three-quarters of the borrowed words, although a sizable number have also been drawn from Ge'ez (ancient Ethiopic) and South Arabian.⁴³ As Nicolai Sinai rightly notes, these foreign terms reveal that the Qur'anic corpus—at some point and in some fashion—had “profound linguistic contact with the Fertile Crescent.”⁴⁴ The Qur'an, therefore, developed within a context that was permeated with the languages and cultures of Judeo-Christian Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia. Is this a good fit with Mecca and Yathrib in the early seventh century? Not so much, it would seem, at least judging from the evidence that is presently available.“
- Even more problematic in this regard is the fact that neither Mecca nor Yathrib had any Christian presence at all, as evidenced not only by the Islamic tradition but also by contemporary sources from the Christian tradition itself. How, then, are we to explain the enormous amount of material in the Qur'an that has been drawn from the Christian tradition, borrowings that extend well beyond the mere appropriation of foreign religious terms from Syriac, as significant as these are in their own right? Where did this vast knowledge of Christian lore come from? Without the presence of substantial and well-developed Christian communities in the Hijaz, it is truly unthinkable that the Qur'an, or at least a great deal of it, could possibly have been composed in Mecca and Yathrib.
- Thus Sidney Griffith observes, “the most basic thing one notices about the Qur'ān and its interface with the bible is the Islamic scripture's unspoken and pervasive confidence that its audience is thoroughly familiar with the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, so familiar in fact that there is no need for even the most rudimentary form of

introduction.”⁴⁷ And yet, there is no evidence of any Jewish presence at all in Mecca, and a clear absence of Christianity in the central Hijaz altogether. This Christian void is all the more significant since, as we noted in the previous chapter, Joseph Witztum and others have convincingly argued that the Qur’an’s presentation of many figures from the Hebrew Bible derives directly from Syriac Christian traditions, and not, as one might expect, from contemporary Jewish traditions.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Qur’an’s anti-Jewish rhetoric and its demonology depend on earlier Christian traditions, while a number of passages seem to address Christians directly.⁴⁹ How, then, can we possibly imagine the composition and ritual use of the Qur’an, which requires an audience deeply knowledgeable of Jewish and Christian biblical and extrabiblical traditions, in a context where Judaism was unknown, in Mecca, and from which Christianity was altogether absent, in Mecca, Yathrib, and the entire central Hijaz?⁵⁰

- Accordingly, should we not understand that it was almost certainly in this context, in the Fertile Crescent, that the vast amount of Jewish and—especially—Christian tradition entered the Qur’anic corpus?
- *“Indeed, a great deal hinges on the presence of a sizeable and vibrant Christian community in the Qur’an’s immediate milieu, a matter to which we will now turn our focus. In the absence of a strong Christian presence, we really must find another home for much of the Qur’an’s content.”* [p245]

A Christ forsaken land

Although Christianity had literally encircled the central Hijaz by Muhammad’s lifetime, there is no indication whatsoever of a Christian community in either Mecca or Yathrib, or anywhere in their vicinity for that matter.⁵² Despite the fact that some scholars of early Islam and Near Eastern Christianity will routinely assert that Christianity had penetrated the Hijaz by the seventh century, this is generally assumed as a matter of convenience and does not have any evidentiary foundation.⁵³ And no matter how many times it may continue to be repeated, there is simply no evidence to support the existence of any significant Christian presence in the Qur’an’s traditional Hijazi milieu, from either the Islamic or the Christian tradition. It is true that the early biographies of Muhammad will occasionally refer to individual Christians living within Muhammad’s orbit, such as his first wife’s cousin Waraqa, whom the tradition remembers as having been a Christian convert.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Waraqa and his Christian faith in particular seem to have been introduced to the traditions about the onset of Muhammad’s revelations, the only occasion when Waraqa appears, to serve an apologetic function. When Muhammad is confused by these awesome experiences, Waraqa explains to him that he has begun receiving a revelation (nāmūs) like the one received before by Moses. Yet one should note that Waraqa is entirely absent from the earliest versions of this episode, which merely relate Muhammad’s receipt of “visions, resembling the brightness of daybreak, which were shown to him in his sleep” and caused him to crave solitude.⁵⁵ Waraqa was no doubt contrived and added to later accounts of the onset of revelation in order to provide Christian validation for the veracity of Muhammad’s teaching.⁵⁶ Accordingly, there is no reason to believe that Muhammad actually had such a Christian relative in Mecca, not only in light of the fabulous unreliability of the early biographies of Muhammad in general, but also given the clear apologetic intent of introducing a Christian witness to this scene in its later versions.

- Indeed, it is rather telling that, as John Wansbrough observes, any Christian characters appearing in the narratives of Islamic origins are “always from outside the Ḥijāz” and their introduction “is always gratuitous, and their alleged place of origin suspicious.”⁵⁸ The Islamic tradition is thus quite unambiguous and consistent in presenting the central Hijaz of Muhammad’s lifetime as devoid of any meaningful Christian presence.

- Indeed, given the very small size of these settlements and their very limited cultural and economic significance, it is hardly surprising to find that neither Mecca nor Yathrib had any Christian population worth mentioning. And a handful of isolated converts, even in the unlikely chance that these existed in the first place, does not provide anything near the level of Christianization required to account for the many passages of the Qur'an that invoke various Christian traditions. The knowledge of Christian tradition that the Qur'an expects of its audience well exceeds the sort of casual, piecemeal knowledge that might come from conversations with one's neighbor or in the marketplace. Even if we were to assume that some missionaries had previously visited Mecca and Yathrib—to little avail—this would not suffice to account for the depth of knowledge that the Qur'an assumes of its audience. It is certainly possible that cultural diffusion from Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia to the Hijaz can account for the spread of big ideas and major ideological trends, such as imperial eschatology or the idea of a Promised Land belonging to the descendants of Abraham, from the world of late antiquity to that region. Nevertheless, only a sizable and well-established Christian community in the Qur'an's immediate milieu can effectively explain its detailed engagement with more specific elements of the Christian tradition.⁵⁹ Anything less would not supply an audience with the innate knowledge of the breadth and depth of Christian culture required for these passages to connect.
- *The Qur'an's Christian content is effectively incomprehensible in Mecca and Yathrib without the presence of a large and highly literate Christian community, such as we find in Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia—something along the order of Edessa, Nisibis, or Antioch, as Guillaume Dye rightly notes. From what we have seen regarding the nature of Mecca and Yathrib in the lifetime of the prophet...it is quite clear that neither settlement can provide anything remotely approaching such a context” [p247]...[the evidence indicates that there was] no meaningful Christian presence anywhere near Mecca and Yathrib. For instance, as we have already noted, the Islamic historical tradition is unwavering in its blanket identification of Mecca's inhabitants—at least, those who did not follow Muhammad—as polytheist “associators.” There is no mention of any Christian community or anything Christian at all, other than, as we have noted, a few stray individual converts, whose Christianity is of dubious historicity.⁶³ The same pattern holds true for Yathrib, where, we are told, there was some sort of a Jewish community that was initially a part of Muhammad's new religious movement, but there is no indication of any Christian presence at all. But since much of the Qur'an's “Jewish” material appears to derive, as noted, from Christian rather than Jewish traditions, the Jews of Yathrib also cannot explain the Jewish and Christian lore that the Qur'an so regularly—and tersely—echoes.” [p247]*

One must also consider the fact that we have ample evidence for the presence of significant Christian communities elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula. It is abundantly clear that there were Christians in Yemen, at the southern tip of the peninsula, a region that was closely connected with Christian Ethiopia across the Red Sea, and also all along the Persian Gulf, where the Christian communities were a vital part of the (Nestorian) Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire, as were the Christian Arabs of Ḥīra in southern Mesopotamia. In these places, a broad range of evidence converges to indicate a Christian presence: inscriptions; the remains of churches and monasteries; mentions of bishops from these areas in synodal acts; and hagiographical accounts of figures from these regions.⁶⁸ Likewise, in the far north of the Hijaz on the Roman frontier, the remains of a Christian monastery have been found at Kilwa, and near Tabuk, there are pre-Islamic inscriptions that bear witness to generic monotheist belief—although these are not specifically Christian.⁶⁹ Yet one must note, Tabuk is more than five hundred kilometers

(more than three hundred miles) north of Yathrib, and Kilwa is over six hundred kilometers (almost four hundred miles) away: indeed, both are solidly within the orbit of the Roman Empire and the Nabatean kingdom and quite far removed from Mecca and Yathrib. Likewise, Yemen was not only nearly seven hundred kilometers from Mecca (over four hundred miles), but, as we already noted, this region was culturally, socially, and linguistically quite distinct from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, and its inhabitants “did not view themselves as Arabs before the coming of Islam and neither should the modern scholarship call them that.”⁷⁰ The Persian Gulf is, of course, farther still and separated by a vast and punishing desert.

“Indeed, many scholars have desperately sought any evidence that could possibly reconcile the Qur’an’s immense Christian content with its traditional origins in the Hijaz to no avail. At best they can appeal to the evidence for Christianity hundreds of miles away elsewhere in Arabia, pleading that on this basis we should assume that Christianity must have similarly established itself solidly in the central Hijaz, despite the complete absence of any evidence for this and also the enormous distances involved.⁷⁵ Or, better yet, as one very senior scholar once insisted to me, “the Qur’an itself is the unmistakable evidence” of a Christian presence in Mecca and Yathrib. But of course, such logic begs the question completely and avoids entirely the tricky matter of trying to discern where the Qur’an took shape as the text that we now have. There is no mention in any literary source of a bishop in the central Hijaz; nor is there any reference to any other Christians there, beyond the handful of individuals briefly identified in the much later Islamic tradition. We have the acts of numerous synods and councils for the various churches of the late ancient Near East, and while bishops are regularly identified for those areas in which we otherwise have evidence of a Christian community, there is never any mention of Mecca, Yathrib, or any other location in the central Hijaz. There are no archaeological remains of any Christian church, monastery, or monument in this region, although, admittedly, it has not been possible to excavate in and around Mecca and Medina. The fact remains, to quote François Villeneuve, that “to the south of a line passing noticeably at the latitude of Aqaba, there is quite simply almost no trace of Christianity—from any era, for that matter.” The recent epigraphic surveys of western Arabia further bear this out: among thousands of graffiti to have emerged lately from this region, there are “neither Christian texts nor crosses.” The only exceptions to be found are “four to six short Greek graffiti with or without cross, lost among thousands of other graffiti, on cliffs at caravan crossing points, north of Hegra [Madā’in Ṣālih]. Statistically it is practically nothing, and these reflect people who were in passing, not people fixed in place.”⁷⁶ This profound dearth of evidence cannot be owing to chance, Villeneuve observes; nor should we imagine that the Saudi Arabian government has somehow covered up any traces of a Christian presence. By contrast, north of the line between Aqaba and Kilwa, there is plenty of evidence for Christianity, from the fifth century on.” [p250]

This Christian void in the Qur’an’s traditional birthplace certainly makes it difficult to accept the standard narrative of the Qur’an’s origins entirely in Mecca and Yathrib during the lifetime of Muhammad. The cultural deprivations of the central Hijaz make it effectively impossible for a text so rich in Christian content, like the Qur’an, to arise strictly within the confines of this evidently Christ-barren milieu. In the absence of a vibrant and literate Christian community, it is difficult to imagine where Muhammad, or anyone else in Mecca or Yathrib, would have acquired such a vast knowledge of Christian lore. Likewise, without an audience steeped in Christian traditions, one wonders who would have been able to understand these parts of the Qur’an.

Even if Muhammad's hypothetical travels may have brought him some acquaintance with the Christian tradition, one would hardly expect him to have acquired more than a very superficial knowledge during any business trips he took to Christian lands. As Dye rightly notes, "nothing allows us to imagine Muhammad as a travelling polymath, who would have studied in the academies or monasteries of Syro-Palestine, Ḥīra, or Beth Qaṭrayē."
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"Not only does the absence of literacy make this effectively impossible, but so too does the absence of any Jewish and Christian communities in Mecca. Indeed, if there had been, one would need to presume, as we have suggested before, that Mecca must have been highly Christianized at the beginning of the seventh century. One might also add the stark reality that bibles were in general very expensive and extremely rare in any context before the sixteenth century, let alone one as barren and remote as late ancient Mecca. Even most Christians of this era would have never laid their eyes on a complete Bible; nor would they have ever even been in the same room with a book containing the scriptural canon. Bibles were scarce because books were scarce, and expensive. The simple fact is that most churches in late antiquity and the Middle Ages would not have owned a Bible, so that it seems really farfetched to imagine a copy of the biblical text in Mecca (in Arabic?) that would have been available to Muhammad and his followers.⁸¹ If there was no sizeable Christian or Jewish community in Mecca, how can we possibly expect a copy of the Bible to have been there?" [p252]

The absence of Christianity and Christian culture in the central Hijaz effectively leaves us with only two real options for understanding the composition of the Qur'an. One possibility is to remove Muhammad and his prophetic mission from this isolated region, which does not seem to have had significant interaction with the world of Christian late antiquity, and to locate the origins of Islam instead in some other more fecund cultural matrix with a significant Christian presence. Such was the solution advanced by Wansbrough, for instance, and in a slightly different fashion by Cook and Crone in Hagarism and—somewhat more cautiously—by Hawting. [p252]

According to Wansbrough, Muhammad's followers chose this region to be their land of origins only after their faith had emerged within the sectarian milieu of Mesopotamia. The Hijaz afforded them with what amounted to a blank slate, onto which they could inscribe a memory of the origins of their community unimpeded by any preexisting traditions. The relative cultural isolation of the Hijaz further allowed them to insist that their religious faith had not been formed primarily in the crucible of late ancient Judaism and Christianity but came instead directly from on high.⁸³

The case of the Kathisma church and the Qur'anic Nativity tradition in 19:22–28, which I have discussed elsewhere in some detail, leaves little question that we must approach the Qur'anic text as a corpus of traditions that remained open even beyond Muhammad's lifetime and was continuing to absorb Jewish and Christian traditions in the decades after the Believers conquered and occupied the Near East.⁸⁶ In these seven verses, the Qur'an gives a highly compressed account of the birth of Jesus that depends on a distinctive combination of Christian Nativity traditions that is uniquely found—outside the Qur'an—only in the liturgical practices of a particular Marian shrine just outside Jerusalem, the Kathisma church. In the vast world of late ancient Christianity, it is only at this church that we find combined the two early Christian traditions that appear in the Qur'an's account of the Nativity: Christ's birth in a remote location (rather than in Bethlehem) and Mary's refreshment by a miraculous palm tree and spring. For good measure, one must add, the liturgical traditions of this same shrine also explicitly name Mary as the sister of Aaron,

just as in the Qur'an's Nativity account, at last providing a clear solution to this "well-known puzzle" of the Qur'an.⁸⁷ The correspondence between this Qur'anic passage and the traditions and liturgical practices of the Kathisma church is simply too close to be mere coincidence: clearly the Qur'an knows, and expects its audience to know, this particular configuration of Christian Nativity traditions.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that this peculiar fusion of traditions was known even among Christians who lived outside Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It is therefore hard to believe, if not entirely unthinkable, that this unique combination of traditions achieved at the church of the Kathisma would somehow have been widely known among Muhammad's nonliterate followers in the central Hijaz, so that they could have had any chance of understanding the compressed and elliptic reference to them in Qur'an 19:22–28. Indeed, it boggles the mind to imagine that somehow this distinctively Jerusalemite combination of Nativity traditions could have been widely known and understood by the hundred or so illiterate herdsmen in the remote desert village of Mecca (since this is alleged to be an early Meccan sura), particularly when we find no evidence of any knowledge of this particular configuration of traditions anywhere else in late ancient Christianity—other than the Kathisma.⁸⁸ The suggestion that somehow this distinctive mixture of traditions could have reached Muhammad and the citizens of Mecca, and them alone, in their barren, isolated hamlet strains credibility in the extreme.

The easiest and most probable explanation is instead that the traditions of the Kathisma inspired the Qur'an's Nativity traditions, which were added to the corpus only after Muhammad's followers took control of the Holy Land. The fact that the early Believers turned this Christian shrine into a mosque with decorations referencing the Qur'anic Nativity story soon after their conquest and also modeled the Dome of the Rock after it seems to verify the connection between this shrine and the Qur'an.

The Qur'an therefore has many different sources, as indicated no less by the literary character of the Qur'an itself. As Cook and Crone rightly observe of the text that has come down to us, "The book is strikingly lacking in overall structure, frequently obscure and inconsequential in both language and content, perfunctory in its linking of disparate materials, and given to the repetition of whole passages in variant versions. On this basis it can plausibly be argued that the book is the product of the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions."⁹¹

"The Qur'an," Dye writes, is not a book, but a corpus, namely the gathering of texts: 1) which were not originally intended to be put together in a codex, nor composed with this goal in mind, 2) which are heterogeneous: they belong to a variety of literary genres, and sometimes express divergent ideas (even if there are also ideas and concerns that come up throughout the corpus in a coherent and systematic way), 3) which are, in some cases, independent, and in others, dependent on one another: there are thus numerous parallel passages in the Qur'an—certain passages reuse other passages, often rewriting them, correcting them, or responding to them. . . . The Qur'an appears therefore as a work that is both composite and composed. Composite because it brings together texts that are partly independent and heterogenous; composed because they have been put together using techniques of composition that generally come from a scribal, literate context, and not just oral spontaneity or haphazard collection, even if these elements can also often be found...

This final layer of literary polish came only after decades of oral transmission and constant adoption and adaptation of traditions and it was ultimately achieved in the final composition of the canonical text of the Qur'an, under the supervision and coordination of

'Abd al-Malik. This is the Qur'an that we have today: an imperially produced and enforced version that brought uniformity and order to the muddled and diverse history of the Qur'anic text that preceded it. Thanks to this effective exercise of raw political power, much that we would like to know about the complexity of Qur'an's prior history is shrouded in mystery, requiring us to proceed cautiously and skeptically, guided always by the hermeneutics of suspicion, historical criticism, and the historical study of religions.
“ [p256-257

CLAIM: Mecca was a Major religious sanctuary

Q. Did Mecca become a centre of influence and trade because it housed a religious sanctuary and was the site of pilgrimage?

A. The pre-Islamic Arabs did trade during the pilgrimage. But they did not trade in Mecca during the pilgrimage, because the pilgrimage did not go to Mecca before the rise of Islam

- Defenders of the SIN usually argue that Mecca became a trade centre by virtue of it being a religious sanctuary or 'haram'. They say that this meant that it had visitors all year round for 2 reasons:
 - B. An annual pilgrimage that became a pilgrimage fair *"a typical.. combination of pilgrim centre and marketplace"* [F.M. Donner, the early Islamic Conquests, p51]
 - C. Being haram, no blood could be shed there and therefore *'it was a place to which men could come without fear or molestation'* [Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca p3]
- The SIN also says that Mecca was a sanctuary that attracted pilgrims but even then, *'how could the Meccans cope with thousands of pilgrims, their mounts, and other animals on top of the local human and animal population'* [p160]
- This assertion has been made by so many Islamic and Western scholars that it has become almost 'axiomatic' and unquestioned. But an examination of the evidence shows that we should not be so hasty in jumping to this conclusion.
- As we have seen, there is no mention of Mecca in the earlier or even more contemporary writers of Mecca as a trade centre.
- The tradition available is *'almost unanimous that it was not a pilgrim fair. A famous list of pre-Islamic fairs enumerates some 16 fairs as having been of major importance in Arabia before Islam. **Not one of the several versions of this list mentions Mecca**'* [Crone Meccan trade and rise of Islam p170, emphasis added]
- The German scholar Wellhausen in 1887 argued that Mecca was NOT a pilgrimage century. Crone states that *'it is thus reasonable to conclude with Wellhausen that Mecca was not an object of pilgrimage in pre-Islamic times. It follows that there was no pilgrim fair either'* [Crone p176]
- ***'Wellhausen's hypothesis makes effortless sense of the evidence. The pre-Islamic Arabs did trade during the pilgrimage. But they did not trade in Mecca during the pilgrimage, because the pilgrimage did not go to Mecca before the rise of Islam'*** [Crone p173, emphasis original]

- Crone's analysis forces us to ask a more fundamental question: did Mecca exist before Islam?

“An analysis of discrepancies between the secondary literature and the sources, and of conflicting information within these sources, leads to evidence suggesting that a more radical hypothesis should be pursued. If the Meccan haram attracted no pilgrims, conferred no inviolability on its inhabitants and in no way affected economic activities, in what sense did it exist at all?” [Crone p185]

- She suggests that the Mecca as a 'sacred place' is of ISLAMIC origin rather than PREISLAMIC.
18. Why should the guardians of a sanctuary have made a living as traders, craftsmen and camel herders. These occupations were not seen as 'holy'. Men who looked after a sanctuary worked full-time in this endeavour, STAYING THERE rather than being nomadic caravaners. The best example is the Levites being set apart by Yahweh to devote their lives to working for the temple. They did not even have their own lands and had to depend on the tithes from the rest of the population.
 19. The Quraysh do not seem to have performed any of the services expected of pre-Islamic guardians eg divination/ fortune telling,
 20. Religious shrines are dedicated to ONE particular god/goddess. Who was the deity whose sanctuary the Quraysh are supposed to have guarded? We are told that Hubal was one of the gods in the Meccan shrine, but the traditions mention more than 300 others, which were supposed to have collapsed when the Prophet recited Sura 17:82 (Al Waqidi, Azraqi, Ibn al Kalbi)
 21. As for 'Allah', the supposed God of Abraham, we don't have any evidence for this outside of the Islamic tradition. The veneration of the 'black stone' is more in line with pagan stone worship common in the region than in the rigid monotheism seen in the Old Testament.

Was Dushara worshipped at Mecca?

- Ibn Ishaq records who Al-Tufayl bin Amr of Mecca accepted Islam. When he returned to Mecca his wife also accepted Islam so he told her to go to the hima (sacred area) of Dhu-al-Shara (the Nabatean god Dushara) and cleanse herself from it
- According to the evidence, Dushara was the god of the Edomites and Nabateans, and the centre of worship was in PETRA. So if Al-Tufayl told his wife to go to the sacred area of Dushara, it would have meant a trip of 1000km to Petra.
- We also know that the Nabateans worshipped stones and rocks from ancient times. The 2nd century writer Maximus of Tyre writes about the Arabs serving a stone.
- There is the Suda Lexicon, compiled at the end of the 10th century but referring to older sources talks about the worship of the stone representing the God Ares. ‘*Namely the god Ares, is in Petra in Arabia. The god Ares is revered among them; for this one they especially honor. The statue is a **black stone**, square in shape, unchiseled*’ [emphasis added]In the original Greek it would have begun with ‘Theus Ares’. Linguist Robert Kerr hypothesises that this would have become ‘Deus Ares’ in Latin and thus ‘Dushara’.
- Whether he is right or wrong, it is clear that the Nabateans worshipped a black stone and Dushara at PETRA, things that the SIN says happened in Mecca. This is not consistent with the SIN.
- It is therefore much more likely that the Holy City was close to Petra. Again this suggests NORTH ARABIA or SOUTHERN PALESTINE.

Was Mecca was a Major religious sanctuary?

Q. Did Mecca become a centre of influence and trade because it housed a religious sanctuary and was the site of pilgrimage?

A. The pre-Islamic Arabs did trade during the pilgrimage. But they did not trade in Mecca during the pilgrimage, because the pilgrimage did not go to Mecca before the rise of Islam

- Defenders of the SIN usually argue that Mecca became a trade centre by virtue of it being a religious sanctuary or 'haram'. They say that this meant that it had visitors all year round for 2 reasons:
 1. An annual pilgrimage that became a pilgrimage fair "*a typical.. combination of pilgrim centre and marketplace*" [F.M. Donner, the early Islamic Conquests, p51]
 2. Being haram, no blood could be shed there and therefore '*it was a place to which men could come without fear or molestation*' [Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca p3]
 - The SIN also says that Mecca was a sanctuary that attracted pilgrims but even then, '*how could the Meccans cope with thousands of pilgrims, their mounts, and other animals on top of the local human and animal population*' [p160]
 - This assertion has been made by so many Islamic and Western scholars that it has become almost 'axiomatic' and unquestioned. But an examination of the evidence shows that we should not be so hasty in jumping to this conclusion.
 - As we have seen, there is no mention of Mecca in the earlier or even more contemporary writers of Mecca as a trade centre.
 - The tradition available is '*almost unanimous that it was not a pilgrim fair. A famous list of pre-Islamic fairs enumerates some 16 fairs as having been of major importance in Arabia before Islam. **Not one of the several versions of this list mentions Mecca***' [p170, emphasis added]
 - The German scholar Wellhausen in 1887 argued that Mecca was NOT a pilgrimage century. Crone states that '*it is thus reasonable to conclude with Wellhausen that Mecca was not an object of pilgrimage in pre-Islamic times. It follows that there was no pilgrim fair either*' [p176]
 - '**Wellhausen's hypothesis makes effortless sense of the evidence. The pre-Islamic Arabs did trade during the pilgrimage. But they did not trade in Mecca during the pilgrimage, because the pilgrimage did not go to Mecca before the rise of Islam**' [p173, emphasis original]
 - Crone's analysis forces us to ask a more fundamental question: did Mecca exist before Islam?
- "An analysis of discrepancies between the secondary literature and the sources, and of conflicting information within these sources, leads to evidence suggesting that a more radical hypothesis should be pursued. If the Meccan haram attracted no pilgrims, conferred no inviolability on its inhabitants and in no way affected economic activities, in what sense did it exist at all?"** [p185]
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- A. Why should the guardians of a sanctuary have made a living as traders, craftsmen and camel herders. These occupations were not seen as 'holy'. Men who looked after a sanctuary worked full-time in this endeavour, STAYING THERE rather than being nomadic caravaners. The best example is the Levites being set apart by Yahweh to devote their lives to working for the temple. They did not even have their own lands and had to depend on the tithes from the rest of the population.
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CLAIM: MECCA HAD KAABA AND BLACK STONE BEFORE ISLAM

The Ka'ba

- This is the cube shaped building that is the centre of Islamic pilgrimage. It is covered with a black cloth and houses the 'black stone'. Muslims perform Tawaf or circumambulate around it in an anticlockwise direction.
- The Quran has several names for the Ka'ba:
 1. 'The House', 'the Sacred House', 'The Ancient House',
 2. the 'City of Security',
 3. 'the Holy House',
 4. 'the Masjid al Haram' ie 'the forbidden place of worship' and the 'Ka'ba'
- Let's look at what how these references line up with the evidence
 5. Sura 95:1-4 places the 'city of security' 'by the fig and the olive, and the Mount of Sinai'. This cannot be consistent with the Hijaz which has neither fig nor olive and is nowhere near Mt Sinai. Again it is more consistent with Northern Arabia.
 6. Bukhari 1:392 and 6:13 records Muhammad praying towards the 'Holy House' for about 17 months before turning to pray towards the Ka'aba. This suggests that there was a Holy House that was EARLIER than the Ka'ba.
 7. Later Muslim writers claim that the direction of prayer was first towards Jerusalem but the Quran does not specify this. It only mentions the journey from the 'sacred mosque' to the 'farthest Mosque' (Sura 17:1)
 8. The original 'Holy House' had many idols in it, including Hubal, Isai, Na'ilah, and the Black Stone. It had a total of 360 IDOLS (Bukhari 3:658, 6:244). If one idol was only 60cm wide, then the length of all 4 walls combined of the Ka'ba would have to have been 240 metres. But the current Ka'ba is 10mx12 metres which gives only a total of 44m. For the current structure to accommodate 360 idols, they would have to have been no more than 12cm wide.
 9. Would people have bowed down to such a small statue? It would have been really cramped so how could you find one particular god among all the others in such a confined space?
 10. The same Hadith talk of Muhammad stabbing the idols with a stick

The Black Stone

- This is described as an irregular oval that is composed of about a dozen smaller stones joined together with a quantity of cement. Many regard it as the remains of a meteorite. It is encased in silver and is housed on one corner of the Ka'ba where pilgrims may touch or kiss it.
- According to Al-Tabari, in 683, Abdallah Ibn al-Zubayr rebelled against the Umayyad Caliphate and declared himself Caliph. He then marched on the 'Holy City', demolished the sanctuary and then took the 'black cornerstone'.
- The Caliph in Damascus then sent an army of Syrians to the Holy City and blockaded it for 40 days (Al Tabari, XX,430,p2). Apparently the armies were close enough to each other that they could shout at each other.
- It is difficult to imagine how this could have been done in Mecca which lies open to the desert on so many fronts.
- Al Tabari records that large stones were hurled at the Ka'ba using a trebuchet (XIX 223-224). There is NO archaeological evidence that such 'cannonball' type objects were ever used at Mecca. There is also no evidence of city walls over which they were hurled.
- We also hear how the blockade ended when there was news of the death of the Caliph in Damascus and the coronation of a new Caliph. The armies then decided to return to Syria. This would mean a large army going 860 miles or 1385km from Mecca to Damascus across blistering hot desert.
- Also, AlTabari says that the new Caliph died within 40 days. Roman soldiers were expected to march 20 miles in a day, so even if these warriors were able to do that, it would still have taken them 43 days to get there.

What about the Ka'ba?

The idea of a cubical sanctuary around which people marched was not unique to Mecca and was common practice in the ancient near east [Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Early Islam]

- The Ka'ba is referred to in Sura 5:95 and 5:97

"O you who believe! Kill no game while you are in a pilgrim's garb or in the Sacred Precincts. And whosoever amongst you kills it intentionally he shall recompense by sacrificing a domestic cattle, the like of the animal he has killed, the same to be determined by two just persons from among you, and (the same) to be brought as an offering to the Ka'bah, or the expiation (of his sin) is the feeding of a number of needy persons, or the equivalent in fasting, so that he may suffer the penalty of his deed. Allâh has pardoned whatever might have happened in the past, and whoso does it again Allâh will punish him (for his offence), for Mighty is Allâh, Lord of retribution. "

5 : 97 Allâh has made the Ka'bah, the Holy House (at Makkah) to serve as an anchor (- a means of support) and a means of uplifting for humankind, and also (each) sacred month and animals brought as an offering and animals wearing necklaces (meant for sacrifice during the Hajj). He has done this that you may know that Allâh knows all that lies in the heavens and all that lies in the earth, and that Allâh has complete knowledge of all things.

- There are several reasons why this is not a direct reference to Mecca:

E. the verses only refer to a Ka'ba and the word 'Makkah' is in parentheses.

F. The word Ka'ba simply means 'cube' just as it does in Hebrew. In fact the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon (which housed the Ark of the Covenant) was a 'ka'ba'

G. There were other such shrines in the Ancient near east eg Petra

- KH Ohlig notes this as follows “**After all, there were other Ka’ba’s in the Middle East, which, according to the customs of the time, were circumambulated; in this respect the Quran suggests no connection to Mecca at all.** [p300]

CLAIM: THE DIRECTION OF PRAYER (QIBLA) WAS CHANGED TO MECCA DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Changing of the Qibla

- All mosques have a wall with a niche in it (mihrab) which indicates the direction that Muslims are supposed to turn and pray. This is called the ‘Qibla’
 - According to Al Tabari VI, 1218, p132 Muhammad directed the earliest Muslims to pray toward ‘Syria’.
 - Sura 2:143-145 describes how the Qibla direction was changed during Muhammad’s lifetime. Unfortunately, no place names are given.
 - For the first 107 years AH, the Qibla or direction of prayer was clearly north and west towards Syria or Jerusalem or even Petra.
 - For a further 100 years there are variable directions.
 - From 822, all mosques point towards Mecca. (Dan Gibson, “Early Islamic Qiblas”,2017)
- How could this be the case if the ‘Holy City’ was always Mecca?

What about the The direction of Prayer (Qibla)

There is no evidence to link the direction of prayer to Jerusalem as per the SIN. Only after the rise of the Abbasids in the 8th century does it become established as facing Mecca

2 : 142 *The weak-minded among the people will say, ‘What has made these (Muslims) turn from their (first) Qiblah (- the direction they were facing in their Prayer, the holy place of worship at Jerusalem) to which they conformed (so far)?’ Say, ‘To Allâh belongs the east and the west, He guides him who wishes (to be guided) to the right path.’*

2 : 143 *And thus have We made you a nation exalted and justly balanced so that you may be a guiding example for all people (by carrying to them what you have learnt about Islam), and this perfect Messenger (of God) may be a guiding example for you. And We did not make that which you would have to be the Qiblah but that We might distinguish him who follows the Messenger from him who turns upon his heels. And this (change of Qiblah) is indeed a hard (test) except for those whom Allâh has guided aright. It was not Allâh’s purpose that your faith and your worship should go in vain. Surely, Allâh is Compassionate and Ever Merciful to the people.*

2 : 177 also mentions the word Qibala (turn your faces) in the Arabic “*It is not the sole virtue that you turn your faces to the east or the west but true virtue is theirs, who believe in Allâh, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and in the Prophets; and who give away their wealth (and substance) out of love for Him, to the near of kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer and to those who ask (in charity) and in ransoming the slaves; and who observe the Prayer, who go on presenting the Zakât (- the purifying alms) and those who always fulfill their pledges and agreements when they have made one, and those who are patiently persevering in adversity and distress and (steadfast) in times of war. It is these who have proved truthful (in their promises and in their faith) and it is these who are strictly guarded against evil. “*

- The SIN says that the original Qibla was towards Jerusalem but it was then changed to Mecca. There is nothing in the verses themselves that suggest this. Again note that there are words added in parentheses to support the SIN where the direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca.
- It is thought that Mecca became a pilgrimage site from the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809). If these verses actually did refer to Mecca, it would have been a simple matter to include the word 'Mecca' in the text and everything would be clarified.
- In simple terms, all the verses allow us to conclude is that the direction of prayer could have been changed, but we have no idea where it was changed FROM and where it was changed TO.

CLAIM: ABRAHAM AND ISHMAEL WENT TO MECCA

Where were Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael?

- The SIN says that Abraham went to Mecca with Hagar and Ishmael.
- H. Surah 2:125-127, and 3:95-96 talk about Abraham journeying to Mecca with Ishmael and 'raising the foundations' of the Ka'ba with Ishmael.
- I. Al Bukhari 4:583 says that when Abraham cast out Hagar, he took her to a valley beside the Ka'ba.
- On the other hand, the Bible places this event near Beersheba.
- It says that Abraham lived between Kadesh and Shur in the region of the Negev and that it is here that the story of Sarah and Hagar occurs. *"And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar."*Genesis 20:1 NKJV
- *"Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered."*Genesis 16:13-14 NKJV
- The Bible also says that Ishmael grew up in the 'desert of Paran', which is the traditional home of the Nabatean people in NORTHERN ARABIA.
- "So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. **He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran;** and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."*Genesis 21:14-21 NKJV
- Given how important Abraham was to the Jewish and Hebrew people, it is hard to believe that they would not be as accurate as they could be about the details of his life.

A journey to the Hijaz and back to build the foundations of a house of worship would have required many months and the Biblical authors would have mentioned it.

- It is also hard to believe that if Abraham were to simply put Hagar away in the wilderness, that he would have taken her more than a thousand kilometres to the south of where he was. This was in the southern region between Palestine and Northern Arabia and this is consistent with the region later known as Paran.
- It is much more likely that ALL of these events took place in this area of southern Palestine/Northern Arabia, and NOT down in the Hijaz at Mecca.

Q.What about the Quranic references to Mecca?

A. Mecca is mentioned only ONCE in the entire Quran. It is vague and does not clearly identify the city of Mecca. References to 'Bakka' DO NOT equate to a reference to Mecca. [Karl Heinz Ohlig, Early Islam]

Mecca (Makka)

- Mecca is mentioned only once in the Quran (Sura 48:24)
It is He Who restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the Valley of Makkah (on the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah) after He had given you victory over them. Allâh observes all that you do.
- Note that the material added in brackets is not in the original Arabic text, so all we have is a reference to a BTN of MKH. The word BTN does not mean 'valley' but 'belly'
- There is also no other information given about this place and nothing to connect it with 'the prophet'
- There are mentions of the 'masjid al haram' or the 'forbidden place of worship' but all this refers to is a shrine or sanctuary. There is nothing to connect it specifically to Mecca. It could mean just as easily mean Jerusalem, Petra or any other holy city.
- The earliest clear mention of Mecca that we have is from the Continuatio Byzantia Arabica 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***

Bakka

- Many translations cite Sura 3:96 as referring to Mecca

Verily, the first House founded for the good of humankind is the one at Bakkah (- the valley of Makkah). (It is the House) full of blessings and a means of guidance for all the peoples.

The following verse says: "Therein are clear Memorials: (The first is) the Place where Abraham stood for prayers (- Maqâm Ibrâhîm); (secondly,) whosoever enters it (- the valley of Bakkah) is in a state of peace and security; (thirdly,) Pilgrimage to the House (- Ka'bah) is due to Allâh from everyone of humankind who is (physically, financially and in many other ways) able and has the means to make the journey thereto. And whosoever disobeys (let him remember that) Allâh is Independent of the worlds.'

- Notice that 'the valley of Makkah' is in parentheses which means that it is not in the original Arabic text. The translators interpret Bakkah as Makkah because the SIN has done so since Tabari
- To read Bakkah as Makkah is simply not correct as they are DIFFERENT consonants and the words are not related. It is like reading 'Berlin' as 'Merlin' in English.
- Christophe Luxemberg applies his hypothesis that the Quran was originally in Syro-Aramaic and when he does this, he comes up with the following translation: 'The first sanctuary which was built for people is the one which he fenced in (defined) as a holy (literally blessed) (district) and (as) a guidance for the people. Luxemberg goes on to say that 'this is confirmed by reading verse 97 which says that Abraham's residence.. can be found int this district and whoever enters it shall be secure" [Luxemberg, The Syro-Aramaic reading of the Quran p336].
- Thus it is reasonable read the reference to 'Bakka' as referring to some fenced in holy district but there is no evidence for it to refer to Mecca.

What about Medina? (Al-Madina). It should be noted that the references are vague and 'Al Madina' just means 'the town'. There is nothing specific to connect it to Yathrib and there is nothing to verify the SIN account.

- The SIN traditionally states that Sura 63:8, Sura 9:101, Sura 9:120 refer to Medina or Yathrib.
- The reference in 63:8 could refer to any a town other than Yathrib.
- The other 2 references could refer to Yathrib but they do not describe the people in positive terms and this contrasts with how the SIN describes the attitude of the Medinans to Muhammad.
- These references do not help us verify whether or not the account is verifiable.

What Islamic Sources Claim about Mecca	What the Evidence tells us	Is SIN consistent with evidence?	Is Mecca the original 'Holy City' of Islam
Mecca was mother of all cities	No Archaeological evidence in Mecca for 7th century	NO	Unlikely
Mecca was the centre of trade route	Mecca was not a major trade centre in 7th century	NO	Unlikely
Is Mecca found on early maps?	No mention of Mecca on maps before AD 900	NO	Unlikely
Mecca was in a large valley with a stream through it	Mecca is NOT in a valley and there is no stream	NO	Unlikely
Mecca has high mountains quite close to the Ka'ba	The nearest mountains are 3km away	NO	Unlikely
Mecca has grass, clay and trees	There is no evidence that 7th century Mecca had any of these	NO	Unlikely
Mecca would have been large enough to raise armies of thousands of men with horses	7th century Mecca was at best a small place in a very inhospitable environment	NO	Unlikely
Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca	This was over 1000km from where Abraham lived and is not consistent with Biblical account.	NO	Unlikely
There was a sacred area to Dushara at the holy city	Dushara worship was at Petra, which was 1000km from Mecca	NO	Unlikely

What do Islamic Sources say about the geography of Mecca

1.Mohammad would enter Mecca from a high Thaniya (mountain pass) and leave it from a low thaniya (Bukhari 2 book 26 no 645,647)

2. Al Tabari mentions a story of a Caliph sending messages back and forth Damascus and the 'Holy City' and the Caliph lived only 40 days.

3. Al Tabari mentions that people from Medina entered Mecca from the SOUTH and that the Quraysh of Mecca entered Medina from the NORTH

EVIDENCE

1. There is no evidence of such passes in Mecca today. Mecca is located in a large open area with low Rocky Mountains arising from the sand, not in a mountain range. There is no higher and lower side.

2. Mecca and Damascus are separated by a distance of >1600 km.

How could messages travel this far by camel 'back and forth' in less than 6 weeks? Damascus and Jerusalem are only 318 km apart. Damascus and Petra are 426 km apart. The 'Holy City' must have been relatively close to Damascus. This would fit Jerusalem or Petra FAR better than Mecca

3. Mecca is SOUTH of Medina. So anyone coming from Mecca to Medina would have entered from the South NOT the north. This only makes sense if the 'holy city' was actually NORTH of Medina.

[Gibson, Dan, Quranic Geography, 2011]

EXPLANATION

The SIN is not consistent with the geography. Given that the SIN sources were >200 years after the alleged events, they may well be describing another place with mountains, rivers and valleys that has been redacted back to 7th century Mecca. Petra or Jerusalem would fit this well. Both Petra and Jerusalem are NORTH of Medina. Either of these could have been the 'holy City'

Quran names a number of geographical places

There are 9 places named:

'Ad' is named 23x. This is the Biblical 'Uz' located in JORDAN

'Thamud' named 24x. This is Nabateans, located in JORDAN

'Midian' named 7x. These are Midianites of Bible and also located in JORDAN.

All these civilisations are located in Jordan/Syria NOT the Hijaz. They are nearly 1000km too far north. As we have seen there was no trade between the Hijaz and Jordan

[Gibson, Quranic Geography, 2011]

EXPLANATION

The SIN is not consistent with the evidence. The writer of the Quran was referring to interactions between a prophet and people of Syria and Jordan because the writer of the Quran was LOCATED in Syria and Jordan, NOT from the Hijaz.

The Qibla and the SIN

Islam requires Muslims to pray toward Mecca. This is known as the Qibla. SIN says that Mecca became the direction of prayer in 624 AD. This is described in Q2: 142-143, 149-150

EVIDENCE

Jacob of Edessa writes in 705 about the Mahgraye, a term used to refer to Arabs.

*'So from all this it is clear that it is **not to the south** that the Jews and the Mahgraye here in the regions of Syria pray, but **towards Jerusalem, or the Kaaba, the patriarchal places of their races**'*

[Hoyland: Seeing Islam as Others Saw it]

It should be noted that Mecca is SOUTH of Syria so Jacob is saying that the Arabs did NOT pray toward Mecca and he was writing more than 70 years after Muhammad's death

Canadian Archaeologist Dan Gibson visited dozens of early Mosques and took measurements of their Qiblas. He then used ASTER satellites (Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer) to measure the direction of the Qibla. He found that the Arabs could accurately navigate their way by the stars and that they could determine the direction of Qiblas.

He found that the Mosques faced in one of 4 directions based on when they were built:

1. Those built 624-706 all faced Petra/Jerusalem
2. Those built 706-772 face a point IN BETWEEN Mecca and Petra/Jerusalem
3. Mosques built 727-876 face Mecca. This >100 years after the Qibla was supposedly changed to Mecca
4. Some built in Spain from 732-836 face a direction PARALLEL to the line between Petra/Jerusalem and Mecca

[Gibson: Early Islamic Qiblas, 2017]

EXPLANATION

- The earliest Arabs did not pray towards the Hijaz but prayed to a sanctuary in the Holy Land.
- Gibson says that was in Petra but others dispute this and say it was in Jerusalem.
- Regardless of which one is correct, their sanctuary was NOT in the Hijaz and therefore could NOT have been Mecca.
- The in between Mosques were built in a time of disputing between the Umayyads in Damascus and the Abassids in Baghdad.
- Given that the Abassids really sanctified Mecca, it is quite possible that these Muslims were 'hedging their bets' with their Qiblas and did not want to risk offending either party.
- **THE SIN IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE EVIDENCE.**

Conclusion: Can any of the SIN claims about Mecca be substantiated?

- The SIN makes the following claims:

J. Qurayshi trade developed because Mecca was on the incense route and also located at the crossroads of all major trade routes in Arabia.

K. Mecca was a sanctuary that attracted pilgrims annually and gave protection to those who settled there.

- An examination of the evidence shows that these claims are NOT CORRECT

L. Mecca was NOT located on the incense route

M. Mecca was NOT located on the crossroads of major trade routes

N. Mecca was NOT a major sanctuary and even if it were a minor one, the Quraysh were NOT its guardians.

"The site was barren, devoid of a fertile hinterland except for Ta'if, ill-equipped for maritime trade and much too far away for a caravan trade with Syria of the kind that the sources describe" [p196]

Crone examines several possible mechanisms explaining how Islam could have arisen in Mecca without any meaningful or profitable trade.

1. Did the Islamic empire arise from the foundations of previous colonial powers that had colonised Arabia? Although there is evidence of both Byzantine and Sassanian colonies in Arabia, they are somewhat scattered and do not encompass the entire peninsula.
2. We also see that the SIN says that Muhammad founded the Islamic state via religious preaching among bedouins, rather than building it on the foundations of Byzantine/Sassanian settlements

3. The hypothesis that Islam arose out of a 'nativist' movement ie a reaction among the Arabs to foreign domination is also examined. There are a number of examples of such movements among primitive peoples. There is even the example of a Māori prophet who saw himself as the 'new Moses' that would lead his people out from being under British control in the 1860s. Unfortunately, 7th century Arabia did not have this level of foreign domination.
4. If Mecca was so important to the Arabs as a centre for profitable trade, then why didn't the rest of Arabia come to the aid of the Meccans when Muhammad marched on it? If they did, then Muhammad's movement would have been nipped in the bud.

- Crone then concludes that it is not possible to invoke 'Meccan trade' as an explanation for the rise of the Arab empire.

It is at all events the impact of Byzantium and Persia on Arabia that ought to be at the forefront of research on the rise of the new religion. Meccan trade may well turn out to throw some light on the mechanics behind the spread of the new religion but it cannot explain why a new religion appeared at all in Arabia or why it had such a massive political effect' [p250]

Q.Are the SIN claims about the Mecca consistent with a site OTHER THAN modern-day Mecca?

A. All of the SIN claims about what supposedly happened in Mecca is more consistent with a site in NORTH Arabia or Southern Palestine

- Crone then comes to a conclusion that is consistent with everything else we know about Islam: the evidence on the ground points to an origin NORTH of the Hijaz, in either Palestine or Iraq.

'Form the point of view of the rise of Islam, the problem may be restated as follows. We seem to have all the ingredients for Muhammad's career in Northwest Arabia. Qurayshi trade sounds perfectly viable, indeed more intelligible, without its south Arabian and Ethiopian extensions, and there is a case for a Qurayshi trading venture, or at least diaspora, in the north. One might locate it in Ptolemy's Moka. Somewhere in the north too, was a desert sanctuary of pan-Arabian importance, according to Nonnosus..Jewish communities are well attested in northwest Arabia. Even Abrahamic monotheism is documented there,...Yet everything is supposed to have happened much further south, in a place described as a sanctuary town inhabited since time immemorial, located, according to some, in an unusually fertile environment'