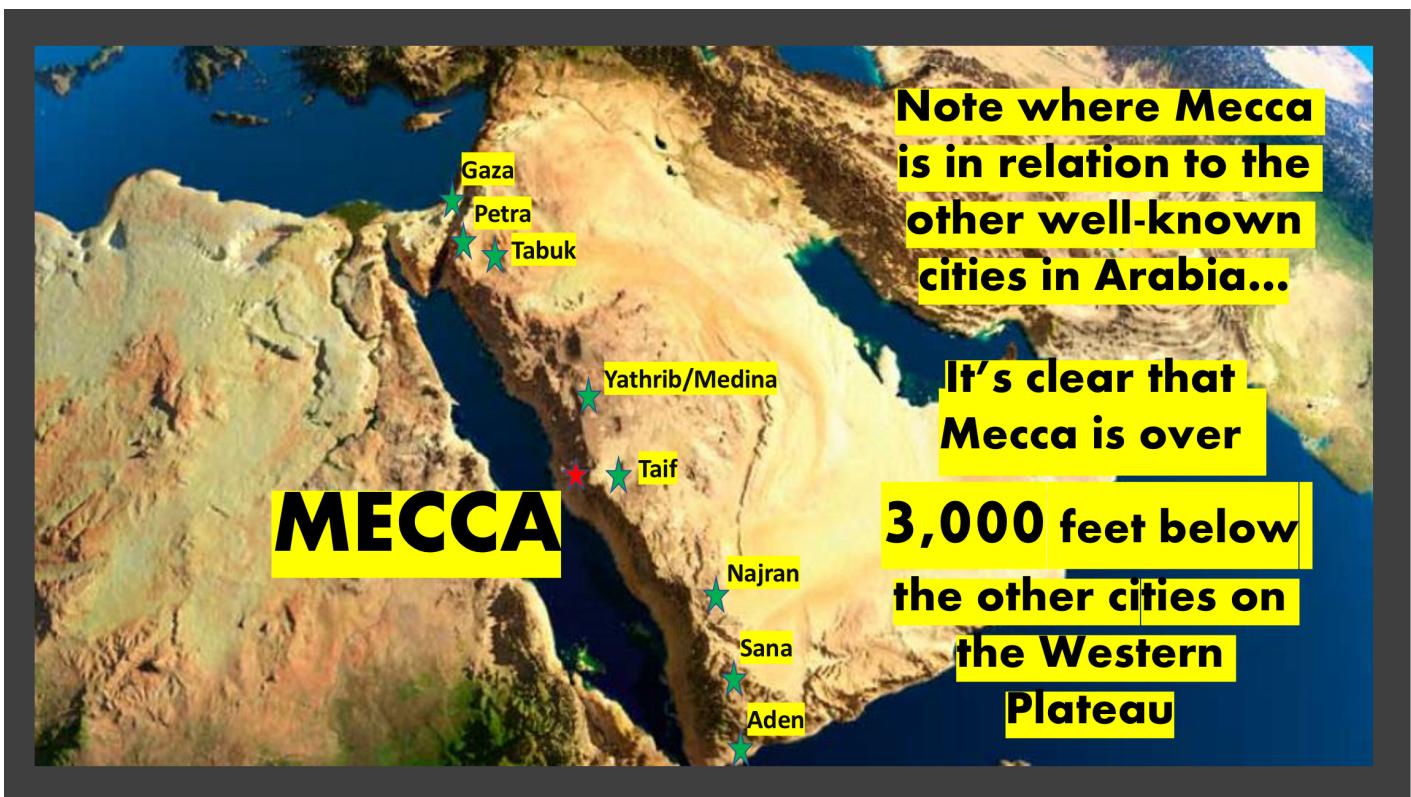


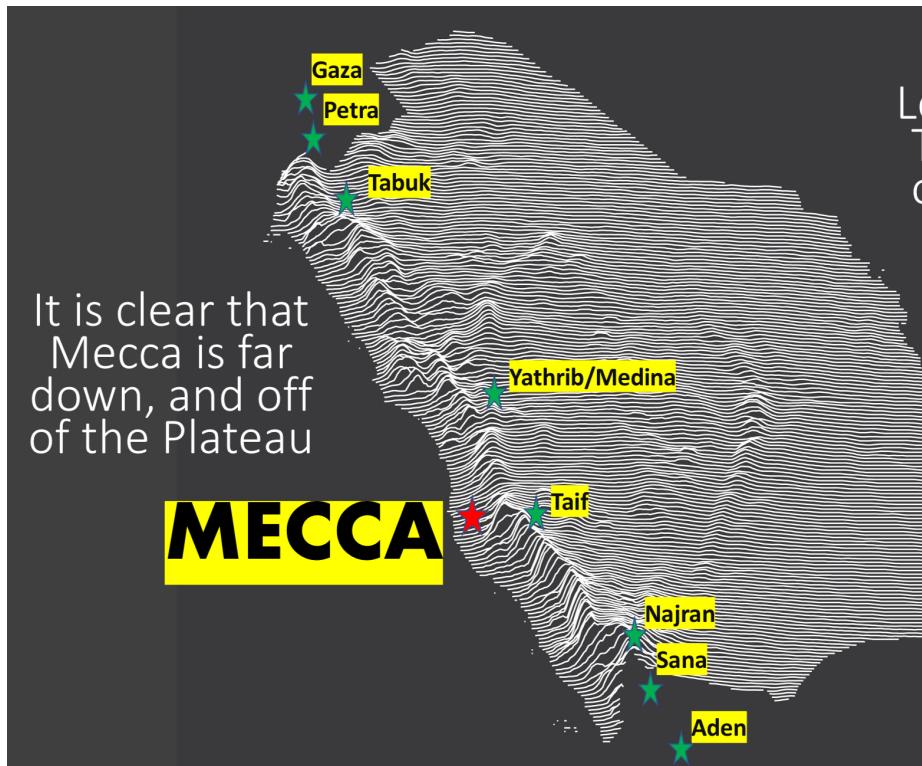
CLAIM: MECCA WAS A MAJOR TRADING CENTRE

The SIN says that Mecca was at the centre of a lucrative spice trade in the 7th century and was therefore a centre of influence. Why would Islamic sources make this claim?

- The idea is that because Mecca is roughly halfway along the route between Yemen in the south and Tabuk and Petra in the North, it was a natural stopping point and therefore became a major trading centre.
- This trade was conducted by caravans that would have taken about 2 months to make the journey and would have stopped about 60 times along the way. Just because Mecca is 'halfway' doesn't necessarily mean that they would have stopped there.
- They would have journeyed along the western plateau from Sanaa, to Najran to Taif and to Yathrib. Mecca was located in a barren valley 1000 metres down. Why would they have made such a steep descent when Ta'if was nearby and had water, food and a religious shrine.
- In addition to this, one must ask **WHAT** commodity did Mecca have that would have made it profitable enough to sustain such an isolated site with no natural resource
- **'Mecca was not just distant and barren, it was off the beaten track as well'** [p7]



The situation becomes much clearer when we look at the topographical map below



So What kind of trade DID go through the western side of Arabia in the ancient world?

Although a land based trade route had existed in the first few centuries BC, by the time of the Roman Empire, most of the trade had become MARITIME. By the 4th century it was cheaper to transport goods 1250 miles by sea than it was to take them 50 miles by land. There were also easily and well known port cities on the West Coast of Africa that supplied these trade ships. Therefore any trade that did exist would have been by MARITIME ie up the Red Sea, rather than by land.

So the idea that Mecca was a trade centre doesn't make sense based on simple economics.

Overview

- There was trade from India to Palestine but the bulk of it went up the Red Sea and was unloaded at the Gulf of Aqaba. This obviously by passes Mecca.
- There were also easily and well known port cities on the West Coast of Africa that supplied these trade ships. They included Assaf (246BC), Adulis (79AD), Suakin (170 AD), Berenica (275 BC), Safaga (282BC)

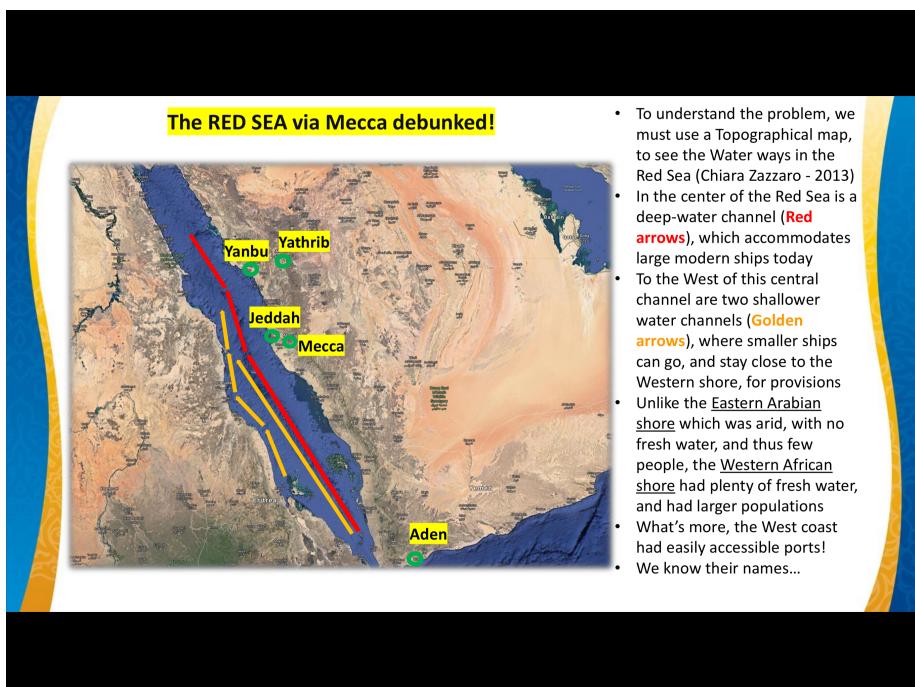
Ports along the WESTERN COAST of the RED SEA = AFRICA!



- The 5 coastal cities along the Red Sea's Western coast:
 - Assab Eritrea (246 BC)
 - Adulis, Eritrea (79 AD)
 - Suakin, Sudan (170 AD)
 - Berenice, Egypt (275 BC)
 - Safaga, Egypt (282 BC)
- Their dates all predate Islam
- All 5 are a day's distance
- On the Red Sea's Eastern Arabian coast, only Yanbu is known, as Yathrib's port city
- What about Jeddah, as a port for Mecca?
- Hawting: We have no history for either Jeddah or Mecca until the 8th century AD
- Why? Because neither had water, nor a population large enough to accommodate early trade
- Without Mecca, what then happens to 7th c. Islam?

The Classical Spice Trade (Arabia to Palestine)

- The spice trade consisted mainly of incense, with the two most important being frankincense and myrrh.
- Frankincense was derived from the resin of trees native to Arabia, East Africa and India. It was burnt in honour of the gods, at funerals, as well as being used as a medicine and in perfumes.
- Myrrh was derived from the resin of trees of a similar family and grew in Arabia, Somalia and India. It was used in perfumes and medicines primarily but also used in embalming and as an incense.
- An overland spice trade route is first mentioned in Hellenistic period by Hieronymus of Cardia, cited by Diodorus. He mentions Nabateans involved in such a trade. Strabo cites Eratosthenes (275-194BC) who mentions overland trade from Hadramat (Yemen) to Minaia. Strabo cites Artemidorus (100BC) who refers to Sabaens receive 'aromatics and deliver them to their neighbours, as far as Syria and Mesopotamia'
- By the 1st century BC, the majority of the spice trade was by sea and Strabo mentions that Arabian 'aromatics' were unloaded at the Nabatean port of Leuke Kome and taken by camel to Petra. By 1st century AD, Greek and Roman traders were involved in spice transport at Yemeni ports. The Roman emperor Trajan (AD 98-117) linked the Red Sea port of Clyisma to the Nile by canal. He also built roads linking Aela (port city on the gulf of Aqaba) to Petra, Bosra and Damascus
- *'In short, the first century AD, the Yemeni incense trade had come to be wholly maritime..It is hard to believe that the overland route survived this competition for long'* [p24]
- Topographical maps of the Red Sea reveal a deep water channel in the middle and two shallower water channels to the WEST of this, that are closer to the coast of East Africa. The deep water one is used by larger ships today but the shallower ones could easily have been used by sailing ships of the 6th and 7th centuries that needed to stay closer to land for fresh water and supplies[Chiara Zazzaro, 2013]



- The other factor to consider is that the incense trade declined dramatically following the rise of Christianity. Although Christians adopted incense burning for some of their ritual, it was in nowhere near the quantities used by the pagan Greeks and Romans. Indeed Nero is said to have burnt the equivalent of the annual production of Arabia at the funeral of his wife Poppaea. Christianity consumed nowhere near this amount.
- Although it was not the ONLY contributing factor, it was a significant one. Therefore, as Crone notes '*There is general agreement that the Roman market failed to survive Christianisation* [p27]
- '*To summarise, the Yemeni incense trade had become wholly maritime by the first century AD, and the Hadrami incense trade must have followed suit shortly thereafter. By the 3rd century AD, the Greco-Roman market had begun to collapse, never to recover. By the time of Mecca's rise to prominence, there was no overland incense trade for Quraysh to take over, and no Roman market for them to exploit*' [p29]
- The distance from Najran in the South to Gaza in the North is about 1250 miles, not counting any detour to Mecca. Crone notes that in Rome in the 4th century, it was cheaper to transport wheat 1250 miles from Alexandria to Rome by SHIP than it was to transport it 50 miles by LAND. Why would the situation be any different in the 7th century?

The Transit Trade (India and the East to Arabia)

- There is some evidence for contact between Mesopotamia and India during the first 2 Millennia BC but it is maritime and not consistent. Indeed, those wishing to travel to the East by sea were told to take 3 years provisions. Mesopotamians told a Chinese ambassador in AD 97 that 'the sea is vast and great'.
- Herodotus says the Darius the Persian ruler 'subdued the Indians and made regular use of this sea'
- By the 3rd century BC Agatharchides mentions the Sabaeans and 'Gerrheans' were involved in trade in goods from India.
- '*Who, then, did make use of the overland route from south Arabia for the transport of eastern goods before the establishment of direct maritime contacts between India and the west? In so far as we can tell, nobody did, or nobody did for very long*' [p39, emphasis added]
- By the 1st century AD, Greeks, Romans and Mesopotamians were sailing directly to India and Ceylon. But as Crone notes... '*The opening up of direct maritime relations between India and the western world made Arabia vulnerable to imperialism*' [p45]
- By the 4th century the most important factor affecting Arabian and Indian trade after the was the rise of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires.
- The Sassanian emperor Shapur II (AD309-379) went as far as Yathrib and up into the Syrian desert. Indeed *both Yathrib and Tihama are said to have had a Persian governor at some stage* [p49]
- By 570 the Sassanians had colonies in Bahrain, Oman and Yemen and controlled the ports of Aden, Suhar and Daba. Ibn Habib mentions that merchants from India, China,

east and west would come to Daba. It appears that only the southern kingdom of Hadramat held out against the Persians.

- The Persians protected their settlements via 'client kings' stretching from Hira to Yemen. They also serviced the silver trade, which was the only overland route of any importance at the time.

Was there a Meccan spice trade?

There is no evidence of any spice trade through Mecca.

- Frankincense and Myrrh ceased to be of economic importance in the Greco-Roman world long before the rise of Mecca.
- There are no references to frankincense in either pre-Islamic or early Islamic poetry.
- The idea of a 'Meccan' frankincense trade was first proposed by Lammens, with no real evidence to back it. He noted that a spice trade was described by Pliny and other classical sources and simply credited the Meccans for overseeing this but without any credible evidence. This was then simply adopted by later writers such as Watt and Rodinson.
- Therefore '*the belief that the Meccans traded in frankincense rest on a methodology akin to the invocation of ghosts. Lammens invented it by crediting the Meccans with the trade described by Pliny, the Periplus and other classical sources, and later Islamists have followed suit*' [Crone: Meccan Trade and the rise of Islam p53]
- Much the same can be said for any other spices that may have been traded. '*As has been seen already, the products of East Africa included francincense, myrrh, cancamum, tarum, cinnamon, casia, calamus, and ginger. The Meccans played no role in the marketing of these goods (insofar as the Greco-Roman world continued to import them)* [p78]

Conclusion

Patricia Crone concludes this analysis with a number of worthy questions. [The following quote is from p50 with emphasis added. I have also reformatted it so that the questions can be seen more clearly]

- Where in all this, one wonders, is there room for the commercial and political supremacy of Mecca against the background of which Muhammad is usually said to have enacted his career?***
- What trade in Arabian spices was left for the Meccans to take over?***
- What trade in eastern products could they possibly have wrested from Persians, Ethiopians, and Greeks?***
- Where in Arabia so 'confined between Persia and Rome', as Qatada put it, was there room for the creation of a far-flung 'Meccan commonwealth'?***
- It does not make sense.***

SO IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT MECCA WAS A MAJOR TRADING CENTRE IN THE 7TH CENTURY

CLAIM: THE MECCANS BECAME WEALTHY BY TRADING IN VARIOUS OTHER COMMODITIES.

Could the Meccans have exported other commodities?

- The only commodities Meccans could have exported were leather and possibly clothing, perfume and camel. They were all cheap and Any profit made would certainly not enough to pay the large armies and***

caravans that the SIN talks about. Therefore any trade would NOT have generated enough profit to make Mecca a centre of influence.

Silver

- Ibn Hisham describes Muhammad's men intercepting a caravan at Qarada, near Najd and that the Meccans traded in silver. Is this true?
- First it must be noted that Ibn Hisham wrote nearly 300 years after the life of Muhammad and he basically edited earlier texts of Ibn Ishak. Putting aside the late date of these accounts, none of these earlier survive today so we have no way of verifying the accuracy of the accounts.
- Sources confirm that silver was mined in parts of Arabia eg Najd and Yemen, but these areas were under Sassanian control. We see evidence of this in the fact that they had Zoroastrian fire temples there.
- The Meccans would have had no access to this silver and no ability to smelt it and there is no mention of silver in trading agreements between Hashim (allegedly great-grandfather of Muhammad) and the Byzantines. If silver were a staple of Mecca, this doesn't make sense.
- The most likely explanation is that Muhammad's men simply stole silver that was mined by the people of Najd who mined it for the Persians. Indeed the source describes how the Meccans are unfamiliar with the route to Qarada and need a guide.
- The Meccans therefore go on an exceptional trip through unfamiliar territory which happened to contain silver mines under Persian control. The idea that they somehow 'traded' in silver is a conflation. Given the time period of 3 centuries between the supposed event and the account, this is not unexpected.

Gold

- Waquidi's account of the raid at Qarada says that the caravan also had gold. As with silver, there were gold mines in the Arabian peninsula but as with silver, these were in the north and south and not in the Hijaz
- Although the sources allege that the Quraysh obtained gold from their neighbours, there is no record of them actually mining it or trading it.
- Gold is also absent from the trading agreement between the Byzantines and Hashim.

Mining Summary

- Any mining sites would have been in the remote, punishing desert in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula. The closest site to Mecca was more than 250km northeast.
- If gold or any other precious metals were mined there, WHY would it be carted back to a small and isolated community whose main markets were leather and dates, when much better markets were available further north.
- The sites for copper mining were even further away ie 450km and 600km and would have had NO impact on the Meccan economy
- Even though literary sources of the 9th and 10th century boast about the gold mines of the Pre-Islamic periods, in the absence of any archaeological we must take these later sources with the proverbial 'grain of salt'.

Perfume

- Patricia Crone (Meccan trade, 1987) accepts that there is some evidence that the Meccans traded in perfume [p95] but would this have been enough to sustain a "city in the desert at a distance of one month's journey by caravan?"

- The Byzantines had their own perfume industry centred on Alexandria, as did the Persians centred on Hira.
- Thus any perfume trade done by the Meccans would have been small-scale and not enough to explain the 'rise of Mecca'

Leather

- Islamic traditions consistently associated leather exports with the Quraysh but again, is this based on facts
- Any leather goods made by Meccans were not very sophisticated and used for diverse purposes eg tents, basins, saddles, oil skins, water skins, sandals etc.
- The problem is that many of the same articles of better quality were made in South Arabia eg Yemen or Qabr Hud in the Hadramat. They were then exported from Sanaa.
- In addition, why would Syrians and other desert dwellers buy lesser quality leather goods from the Hijaz when they could simply make them from the skins of their own animals?
- Even if the Meccans could make good quality leather goods, how could they export them BY LAND cheap enough to be profitable.
- Montgomery Watt addressed this by dismissing any leather trade and focussing on the spices. But as we have seen, there was NO SPICE TRADE, so HOW did Mecca come to be a 'thriving' city?

Clothing

- Islamic tradition credits Hashim as obtaining permission to sell clothing in Syria as well as leather goods. Any clothing made in Mecca must have been simple woollens that were cheap and likely to be unsophisticated
- We see the same issue as with leather: the Syrians had a textile industry of their own and Syria was a better environment for sheep than the Hijaz. Why would they buy inferior products from hundreds of miles away when they could buy from local merchants?
- Islamic sources (Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Saad) also say that the Hijazis themselves imported clothes from Syria and Egypt. These clothes were linen and of finer quality than the coarser woollens that the Meccans are supposed to have produced.
- Thus the traditions would have us believe that the "*Meccans are presented as having risen to wealth by selling cheap clothes transported at a huge distance in exchange for expensive ones transported at a similar distance in return*" [p103].
- It should be obvious that this is unlikely to be correct. The Meccans in all likelihood did not have a significant textile industry.

Other Scholars

After Crone's work, scholars such as Frank Peters and Fred Donner also reached similar conclusions. [Frank Peters: The Commerce of Mecca Before Islam, 1988 and Fred Donner, Fred, Mecca's Food Supply and Muhammad's Boycott, 1977]

Peters writes: '*When we attempt to assemble the widely dispersed and diverse evidence about the commercial activity of pre-Islamic Mecca into a coherent picture of plausible enterprises unfolding in an identifiably historical place, the results are often as varied, and perhaps as little convincing as the sources themselves... Often we are reduced to remarking what is not true of the mercantile life of Mecca before the birth of the Prophet.. The city's connections with what we know to be the broader commercial networks of the 5th and 6th century are far more problematic, however. The later Arab sources strongly urge such a connection, but everything we know about*

international trade in the near East on the eve of Islam raises serious questions about the claim...What information we do possess suggests the very opposite: there was little money in Mecca...Mecca's pre-Islamic commercial prosperity is, in fact, an illusion at worst and a considerable exaggeration at best" [Peters, Frank, Mecca: a literary history of the Muslim Holy land, 1994, 24-32, emphasis added]

Conclusion

- The Meccans may have exported one Yemeni commodity ie perfume.
- They may have exported leather and possibly clothing, cheese and camels.
- But none of these goods were rare in Syria and both the Byzantines and the Persians had their own perfume industries as well as textiles.
- The Syrian landscape was well provided with sheep, camels and their various products so an Meccan products would not have had any advantage.
- Most of the goods were bulky and almost all were cheap.
- None of these goods could have provided enough profit to make Mecca a major urban centre of influence as described by the SIN.

• The above analysis suggests that any important, profitable and politically relevant trade did not occur via Mecca. If there was any trade at all, it the following comments can be made:

- A. It was not transit trade
- B. It was not the trade that attracted the attention of other powers in Egypt or Fertile Crescent.
- C. It was not a trade that presupposed control of any trade routes in Arabia.

CLAIM: MECCA WAS IN A FERTILE AREA WITH MUCH VEGETATION

The SIN sources make claims that portray the Holy City in a fertile area with much vegetation. This is HIGHLY UNLIKE for the same reason

Mecca would not have been a major trade centre; Mecca has very little rainfall and is a very arid location. The absence of any sustainable water makes it unsuitable for agriculture and therefore any long term settlement. This makes the and civilisation and production any commodities that may have been profitable highly unlikely

This can be summed up very simply as follows:

No water=no vegetation=no food=no people=no towns or cities=no civilisation or trade=no history.

The Islamic sources make a number of claims about things that would be completely foreign to desert dwelling nomads

- Quran 7:163-166 describes people who violate the SABBATH by FISHING in a town by the sea

Mecca is located nowhere near the sea with no rivers. There is no evidence of any community of Jews that would observe the Sabbath in 7th century Hijaz

- The most likely explanation is that this part of the Quran most likely originated OUTSIDE the Hijaz in an area where the Sabbath and the sea were familiar. If this part is from outside the Hijaz, then the Quran was not sent down complete. As this is one of the major claims of the SIN, if it is incorrect then the whole narrative falls over.
- In addition we see the following references to things foreign to deserts:
- D. Quran 36:33-34, 56:63-64, 2:261-266 refers to Muhammad's opponents as cultivating grain and grapes
- E. Q 6:99 instructs the prophet to look about him at the grapevines, olives and pomegranates that Allah produced
- F. Quran 6:136-145 talks about them raising livestock and crops.
- G. Quran 18:32-44 talks about grapevines and gardens
- H. Q16:11 talks about olive trees, palm trees, crops and grape vines

The SIN puts Mecca in a valley with a stream (Bukhari 2:645, 685) and 2 kinds of grass (Bukhari,9:90 no 337) fruit (4:281), clay, pomegranates and olive trees . It has mountains overlooking the Kaaba. Ibn Hisham says it has water and trees

- Ancient Mecca would have had none of these as Mecca is located in a desert region. This is the reason why Queen Zubaydah commissioned the Wadi Numan aqueduct in 791-801.
- There is no evidence that 7th Century Hijaz had any agriculture like this.
- These are references to activities that would not have occurred in 7th century Hijaz. It only makes sense if the audience is an agricultural people who raise livestock, not desert dwelling Bedouins.
- *The intensive agriculture of these 'opponents' is not compatible with Mecca's arid location, which had a very poor water supply and only between 60-70mm of rainfall each year, most of it coming in the winter months when it would cause flooding.*
[Shoemaker, 'Creating the Quran, 2022,238-240]

What Agricultural science tells us

- While it would have been theoretically possible to grow pomegranates, palm trees and grapes in the Hijaz, cultivating grain and olives would have been impossible. In its cultivated form, the olive is a tree adapted to Mediterranean conditions as it requires a winter chill to flower and fruit.
- The arid landscape of Mecca could not support the livestock mentioned in the Quran and the entire Hijaz is described even in modern literature as patchy in terms of agriculture, poor in terms of pasture land and generally unproductive.[Crone, Patricia: Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam, 1987, p159]
- Modern science can tell us much about the history of trees and plants in ancient times in a particular area simply by testing the presence of spores and pollens in soil. To date, there is NO RECORD of trees having existed in ancient times in Mecca.
- In addition, Mecca averages only 11cm of rainfall a year. '**With its high desert temperatures and barren conditions, this is scarcely enough to grow any vegetation at all, let alone enough food to support a large population**' [Dan Gibson, Quranic Geography p234]

- All of the archaeological evidence tells us that there was no cultivatable land near Mecca. It is a desert area where no grass grows and there is NO EVIDENCE that the area was ever irrigated in the 7th century. Indeed, this appears to have been the very reason for the construction of an aqueduct by Queen Zubaidah in the early 8th century.
- NOTE: I am not talking about whether or not there are trees today in Mecca. This is an easily accomplished feat with modern irrigation systems. We are talking about whether there would have been trees in the 7th century.

EXPLANATION

The Quran is most likely referring to events and people living further north in Palestine, the Levant, Mesopotamia or around the Mediterranean, NOT the Hijaz. The SIN is unlikely to be correct.

The SIN is not describing the Hijaz but rather an area much further north and much closer to the Mediterranean.

SIN is not consistent with the geography. Mecca was not a centre of significance in 7th century When Mecca DID become significant ie in 8th century, this lack of water had to be overcome.

The SIN is not correct.

Quran 37:133-38 says that the audience passes by Sodom and Gomorrah day by day

- Quran 37:138 suggests that people could pass by the remains of Lot's wife at Sodom in morning and evening suggests that the place the Quran was referring to was in Southern Palestine, not the Hijaz. Scholars agree that Sodom was somewhere around the Dead Sea.
- These locations are nowhere near the Mecca but 800 miles away. These passages suggest a location and landscape for the Quran's audience that is focused on the Holy Lands of the Bible, not the Hijaz[Crone, Patricia: Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam, 1987,p163]
- This suggests that The Quran is most likely referring to events and people living further north in Palestine, the Levant, Mesopotamia or around the Mediterranean, NOT the Hijaz. The SIN is unlikely to be correct.
- The SIN is not describing the Hijaz but rather an area much further north and much closer to the Mediterranean.
- SIN is not consistent with the geography. Mecca was not a centre of significance in 7th century When Mecca DID become significant ie in 8th century, this lack of water had to be overcome. The SIN is not correct.

The Holy City had Grass, clay, loam, trees and grapes

- The SIN says that Holy City had the following:
 - I. grass. Ibn Hishaq (151, p105) talks about the 'glens of Mecca and the beds of its valleys'. Bukhari (9:337) talks about two kinds of grass in Mecca, '*Idhkhir* and *Jalil*'
 - J. Clay and Loam: Al Tabari IV, 1079, p6 describes how Abdallah, father of Muhammad had to wash off 'clay' before he lay with his wife Aminah and conceived Muhammad. Gibson notes that the Arabic word used refers specifically to a clay or loam of a cultivated plot or field.

- K. Trees: Al -Tirmidhi 1535 says that the trees of Mecca said 'peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah'. Sir at Rasul Allah (Ibn Hisham) says that when they came to Mecca, '*they saw a town blessed with water and trees*'
- L. Grapes: Al Bukhari 4:281 tells of a prisoner who was eating a bunch of grapes while in chains and that it was '*not the time of fruit in Mecca*'

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'

WHY GEOGRAPHY OF HOLY CITY DOESN'T FIT MECCA

The Holy City was NORTH of Medina

- The SIN account of the battle of the Trench describes the Quraysh coming from the 'Holy City' and approaching Medina from the NORTH (Al Tabari, VIII 1464 p7)
- Al Tabari describes the Muslims marching NORTH from Medina to attack the Banu Lihyan. They then attacked the Holy City (Al Tabari Vol VIII, p42-43)
- The problem is that the Lihyanites occupied the area of Wadi Rum, south of Petra but NORTH of Medina. Given that Mecca is actually SOUTH of Medina and closer than Lihyanite territory, it does not make sense for an army to march north then turn around and march much further south.

The Holy City was near Khaybar?

- The SIN tells of a man Hajjaj who went to the Holy City via a mountain trail at Al-Bayda. From there he met men of the Quraysh who appear concerned that Muhammad had gone to Khaybar (Al Tabari, Vol VIII p126).
- Al-Bayda is a town 5km from PETRA and this is nowhere near Mecca.
- In addition, why would the Quraysh have been concerned at Muhammad being in Khaybar if they were indeed at Mecca? Khaybar is 600km from Mecca, so if they were in Mecca, why would they be so concerned that Muhammad was 600km away?
- It makes much more sense that the 'Holy City' was in North Arabia/Palestine, not Mecca.

Mecca was near Iraq

- The SIN through Al-Tabari XI, 1993, p68 records that Khalid set out on a pilgrimage from Iraq to the Holy City. According to the text, he kept the pilgrimage secret while his troops marched from Al-Firad in Iraq to Al-Hira.
- The problem with this is that the route from Al-Firad to Al-Hira was 475km but the route to Mecca was 1500km overland. This meant a return journey of 3000km.
- This raises the question: which is more likely?

M. a quick trip to a sanctuary in North Arabia/South Palestine eg Petra or
 N. a 'quick trip' down to Mecca? The answer should be obvious.

- This is further evidence that the 'holy city' was NOT at Mecca and lay somewhere far to the NORTH.

The Conquest of the Holy City: does it fit the evidence?

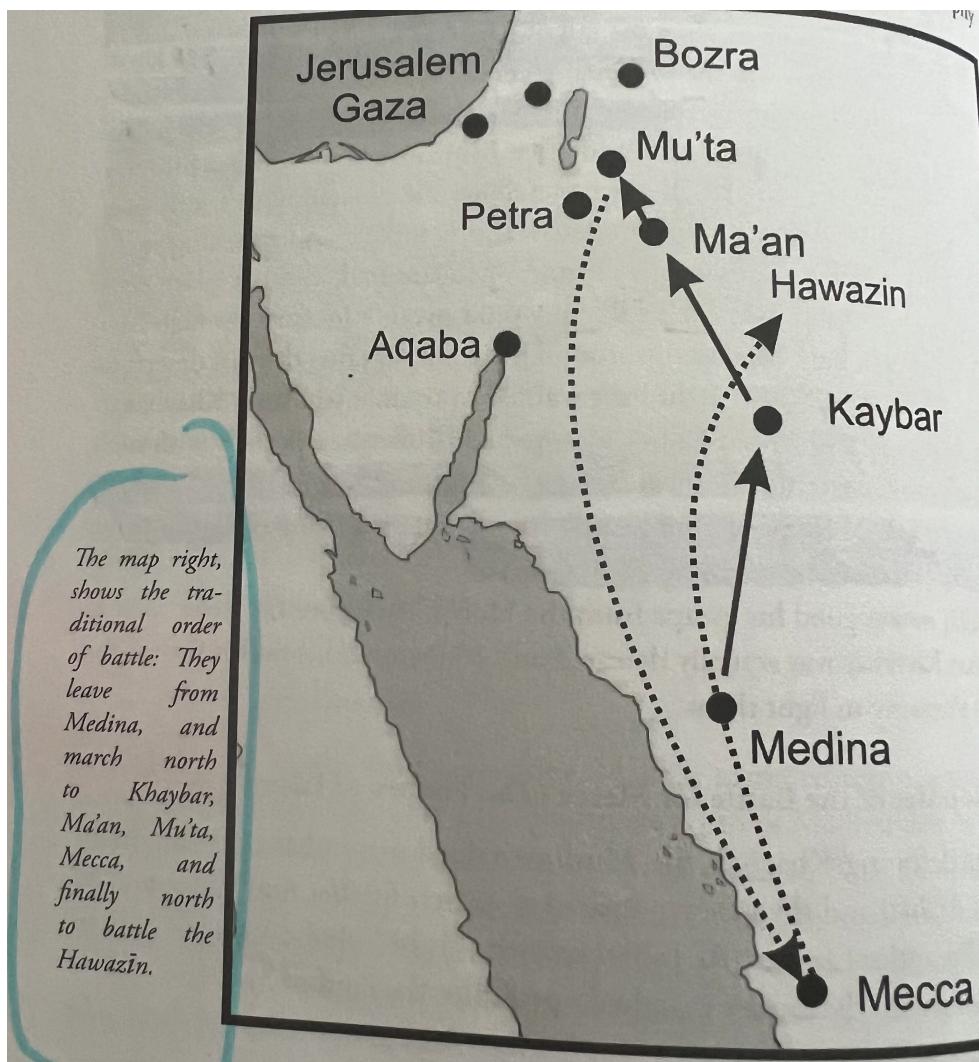
- According to the SIN (Al-Tabari VIII 1611,p152-168. Note that Al-Tabari was writing 300 years after the events he describes allegedly happened).

1. the Muslim armies marched NORTH across the Nafud desert to fight with Heraclius and after a stalemate, they retired to a village called Mu'ta.
2. Muhammad and the Ansar then march all the way back SOUTH to capture Mecca.
3. They then march NORTH again to fight against a tribe called the Hawazin

- What does the geography tell us?

4. Medina to Mu'ta is 900km then from Mu'ta to Mecca by the most direct route is another 1200km. Then to go into northern Arabia to fight the Hawazin is another 1000km. See the Map below.
5. But why wouldn't they have just gone to Mecca first? Or why not attack the Hawazin while they were in North Arabia?
6. Thus for the SIN to be true, a large army would have had to march 3,100km across mountains, burning deserts and waterless plains.
7. It would also mean that the Muslims travelled nearly 1000km for no apparent reason?

This just does not make sense.



- If however, the Holy City was in NORTH ARABIA or Southern Palestine, eg near Petra, then it does make sense because all of these areas were near to each other. It also provides further evidence that the Holy City was NORTH of Medina.

The Sacred City was marked out by large stones

- Ibn Ishaq talks about boundary stones beside Mt Arafa at the sacred city
- In today's Mecca the distance from the Ka'ba to Mt Arafa 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.

CLAIM: MECCA WAS POLITICALLY POWERFUL AND RELEVANT

The Holy City produced large armies

- Gibson shows that the SIN suggests that Mecca was large enough to produce armies of up to 10,000 and rich enough for one caravan to have carried 20,000 dirham.

Source	Year	Event	Size of Meccan Army
Al Tabari VII, p13	623	Expedition to Al Abwa	300 Meccan horsemen
Al Tabari VII p15-16	624	Raid on Meccan Caravan	100 Meccan men, 2500 camels
Al Tabari VII p33	624	Battle of Badr	1000 Meccan soldiers
Al Tabari VII p90	624	Expedition of Al-Sawiq	200 Meccan soldiers
Al Tabari VII p98	625	Expedition to Al-Qaradah, Meccan Caravan	20,000 dirhams captured from the caravan
Al Tabari VII,p110	625	Expedition to Ubud	3000 Meccan soldiers, 200 cavalry
Al Tabari VIII, p13	627	Battle of the Trench	10,000 Quraysh soldiers

- This however meant that the Holy City would needed to have been quite large to be able raise such significant amounts of money and men, not to mention the resources to feed and water hundreds of horses and thousands of camels.
- The archaeological evidence does NOT support this. It suggests that Mecca was a small place in a harsh environment.

Why Mecca could not have been a 'lucrative' or productive centre for the Arabs

- The SIN makes the following claims:
 - O. Qurayshi trade developed because Mecca was on the incense route and also located at the crossroads of all major trade routes in Arabia.
 - P. 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

Q. Mecca was NOT located on the incense route
R. Mecca was NOT located on the crossroads of major trade routes
S. 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.

'From 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"

Conclusion

***'The little evidence that exists of cities, regions and landscapes in the Quran does not provide a sufficient bases to link its preaching to the region of the Arabian Peninsula. The texts themselves are geographically vague in a strange way: they could have originated from anywhere in the Syrian-Arabian region which includes the Middle East"* [KH Ohlig, p304]**

- Patricia Crone (Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam) notes that there are many problems with the idea that Mecca was a 'lucrative' centre for trade:
- The entire Hijaz is quite unsuitable for agriculture. Even in modern times, 'handbook of Arabia' says that Hijaz is 'poor' in terms of pasture land and unproductive. If this is the case in modern times, it would have been much worse in more ancient times.
- The Islamic exegetes say that the reason the Quraysh traded was that they could not make a living any other way in Mecca. Indeed, Al Waqidi says that the prophet tried to intercept caravans which would have been made up of dozens or even hundreds of camels.
- *'The idea that trade in other people's commodities is something one can pull out of one's sleeve for purposes of occupying places unsuitable for...settled occupation is somewhat naive. How, for example, did a city bereft of pasture land provide fodder for 1000 or even 2500 camels of which their caravans are sometimes said to have been composed"* [p159]
- Crone suggests that any Meccan trade was a local trade and an Arab trade ie conducted with Arabs and generated by Arab rather than foreign needs.
- Indeed this problem appears to be the very reason that an **aqueduct was built by Queen Zubaida at the end of the 8th century**
- Crone examines several hypotheses to support supposed Qurayshi trade in light of the Islamic traditions. She concludes that none of these hypotheses are supported by the traditions. *"whichever model we adopt, the fact remains that two areas in particular are reflected in the traditions on the Prophet's life, that is, southern Syria and the northern Hijaz on the one had, the Sarat and other places to the south of modern Mecca on the other. Why should this be so? Where was Muhammad active before the Hijra, and which was the city that he forced to*

surrender or be conquered by force? Where was the sanctuary? There appears to be no way of making sense of Qurayshi trade without undermining the traditions at large” [p166]

- She then returns to the core problem with the SIN, that it is based on traditions that are several hundred years AFTER the events they supposedly describe. She states: *‘What the sources preserve is not recollections of what Meccan trade was like, what rather versions of what earlier storytellers thought it could have been like, each version being perfectly plausible in itself because it is based on knowledge of the kinds of trade that were conducted in Arabia. If this is so, it is not surprising that the traditions fail to add up to a coherent picture, nor should we attempt to make them do so. It would not be the case that certain details are wrong and others right, but that all should be dismissed as embroidery on general themes such as trade, wealth, raids and the like’*. [p166]

Conclusion

- All of the archaeological evidence tells us that there was no cultivatable land near Mecca. It is a desert area where no grass grows and there is NO EVIDENCE that the area was ever irrigated in the 7th century. Indeed, this appears to have been the very reason for the construction of an aqueduct by Queen Zubaidah in the early 8th century.
- NOTE: I am not talking about whether or not there are trees today in Mecca. This is an easily accomplished feat with modern irrigation systems. We are talking about whether there would have been trees in the 7th century.

Mecca was a major trade centre

Q. The SIN says that Mecca was at the centre of a lucrative spice trade in the 7th century and was therefore a centre of influence.

A. There is No evidence of any significant trade that went through Mecca

- This is because Mecca is roughly halfway along the route between Yemen in the south and Tabuk and Petra in the North.
- This trade was conducted by caravans that would have taken about 2 months to make the journey and would have stopped about 60 times along the way. Just because Mecca is ‘halfway’ doesn’t necessarily mean that they would have stopped there.
- They would have journeyed along the western plateau from Sanaa, to Najran to Taif and to Yathrib. Mecca was located in a barren valley 1000 metres down. Why would they have made such a steep descent when Ta’if was nearby and had water, food and a religious shrine.
- In addition to this, one must ask WHAT commodity did Mecca have that would have made it profitable enough to sustain such an isolated site with no natural resource
- *‘Mecca was not just distant and barren, it was off the beaten track as well’* [p7]

Why is it highly unlikely that Mecca could have been a major trade centre?

Mecca has very little rainfall and is a very arid location. The absence of any sustainable water makes it unsuitable for agriculture and therefore any long term settlement. This makes the and civilisation and production any commodities that may have been profitable highly unlikely

This can be summed up very simply as follows:

No water=no vegetation=no food=no people=no towns or cities=no civilisation or trade=no history.

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.

'From 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"

Q. Can any of the SIN claims about Mecca be substantiated?

A. Conclusion

The Holy City of Islam. Was it Mecca?

Was Mecca the Holy City of Islam. How can we answer this question?

1. We can look at a summary of what the Islamic sources say about the 'Holy City' and we can compare it with what we know of Mecca.
2. If there are major inconsistencies then it is reasonable to conclude that Mecca was not the 'Holy City' of Islam.

Mecca is described as the "Mother of all cities"

- Sura 6:92 describes the 'mother of all cities' and Muslims have long decided that this was a reference to Mecca. This suggests that it should be among the oldest if not THE OLDEST city on earth if it is the 'mother of all cities'
- If this were true, we would expect to see substantial archaeological evidence of settlement over thousands of years, dating back further than the time of Abraham (generally agreed to be about 2000BC).
- Unfortunately, we see NO ancient archaeology in Mecca. Gibson describes discussions with leading Jordanian and Saudi archaeologists who spoke on the condition of

anonymity. “They admitted that the archaeological record at Mecca was basically non-existent before 900AD. I had expected them to defend their opinion that ancient Mecca was a walled city with houses, gardens, public buildings and temples. They shook their heads and said, ‘there was nothing like that there’” [p223]

- Conclusion: Mecca was not the Mother of all cities. There is no archaeological evidence of settlement in Mecca in pre Islamic times

Mecca is described as the ‘centre of the trade route’

- Ibn Ishaq (or more correctly Ibn Hisham) describes caravans of merchants coming and going from the holy city and that Muhammad married Khadija who managed such caravans.
- Al Tabari then states that, when he was in Medina, Muhammad would raid caravans coming from Mecca and that some of these caravans were as many as 3000 men.
- Patricia Crone disputes all of this in “Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam”. She states that ‘Mecca was a barren place, and barren places do not make natural halts, and least of all when they are found at a short distance from famously green environments. Why should caravans have made a steep descent to the barren lands of Mecca when they could have stopped at Ta’if’ [Crone, p6-7]
- She also asks ‘What commodity was available in Arabia that could be transported such a distance, through such an inhospitable environment, and still be sold at a profit large enough to support the growth of a peripheral city bereft of natural resources” [Crone, p7]
- To date, no one has successfully refuted Patricia Crone’s findings or conclusions.
- Conclusion: Mecca was NOT at the centre of the trade route.

Can we find Mecca on any early maps?

- By the 2nd century AD, Ptolemy had a detailed map of Arabia and by the 6th century there were maps of the Middle East that were quite useful.
- Ptolemy’s map has no mention of Mecca
- Mecca is not mentioned on any map before 900AD (p224). This is nearly 270 years after Muhammad’s death according to the SIN
- The first mention of Mecca is in Continuatio Byzantia Arabica dated AD 741(109 years after Muhammad’s death.

Do any of the surrounding civilisations talk about Mecca?

- The SIN says that Mecca was both the ‘mother of all cities’ and a major urban centre in 7th century. If this was the case, then there should have been some record of Mecca in the writings of surrounding kingdoms.
- When Archaeologists examine the evidence they find the following:
 1. The kingdoms in Yemen of South Arabia utilised writing from the 10th century BC and there have been thousands of inscriptions/graffiti found to this day. ***NONE mention Mecca.***
 2. Archaeologists have also found substantial evidence of inscriptions/ graffiti in cities/ kingdoms to the North of Mecca eg Khaybar, Dedan and Tayma. ***NONE mention Mecca***
 3. Further north are the Nabatean cities of Meda'in Salish, Petra and others in the Negev which have revealed evidence of ancient writings. ***NONE mention Mecca***

- When archaeologists examine the evidence, they can document many of the small kingdoms that existed in Yemen and South Arabia over the centuries as well as their rulers
 - Kingdom of Nashan ruled by Ab'amar Saqid in 760BC until 480BC under king Yadi'ab Amir.
 - Kingdom of Haram founded 600BC by King Yaharil and existed until the 175BC
 - Kingdom of Inabba founded in 550BC
 - Kingdom of Kimanahu founded by Ammiyitha in 570BC until 475BC under king Ilisami
- So if Archaeologists can date so many small kingdoms BOTH North and South of Mecca, why can they not find any trace of Mecca? **The simplest and best explanation is that Mecca simply did not exist at the time of these kingdoms**

'Dr Michael McDonald at the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Oxford University has been working on a database of Safaitic inscriptions found in Arabia. So far he and his colleagues have collected over 28,000 inscriptions.. To date, not a single reference to the city of Mecca has been discovered, despite thousands of pieces of graffiti written by people going on the pilgrimage. While there is much evidence of people going on pilgrimages to Petra, one wonders why Mecca is never mentioned. It is as if it had never existed' [p325, underlines added]

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'

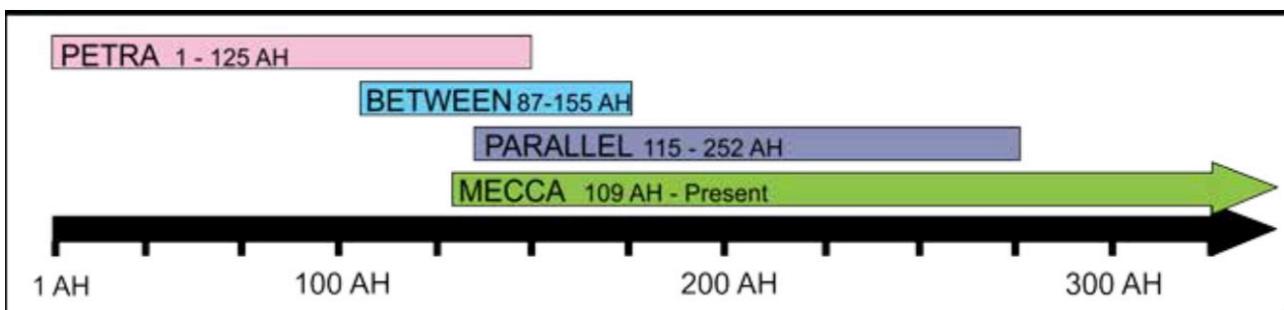
According to Al Tabari VI, 1218, p132 Muhammad directed the earliest Muslims to pray toward 'Syria'.

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.

How could this be the case if the 'Holy City' was always Mecca?

Below we see a summary of these Qiblas from Dan Gibson's 'Early Islamic Qiblas' (2017)



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: 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 on 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: 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 centre. 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.
- 11. 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.
- 12. The Quraysh do not seem to have performed any of the services expected of pre-Islamic guardians eg divination/ fortune telling,
- 13. 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)

14. 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 was 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 areal) 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.