

Qur'ānic Geography

Summary of the argument of D. Gibson

| | |
|--|----|
| PROBLEMS WITH MECCA | 2 |
| Early descriptions of the Holy City | 2 |
| 1. Described as the ‘mother of all cities’ ² | 3 |
| 2. Described as the ‘center of the trade route’ ² | 3 |
| 3. Mecca missing on early maps | 4 |
| 4. The Meccan valley | 4 |
| 5. Mecca’s mountains don’t seem quite right..... | 5 |
| 6. Mecca is described as having a high and low side, and a road from either side. | 7 |
| 7. Grass grew in the original Holy City valley | 8 |
| 8. The original Holy City had clay and loam | 9 |
| 9. The original Holy City had trees | 9 |
| 10. The original Holy City had grapes growing in it..... | 9 |
| 11. The Holy City produced large armies..... | 9 |
| 12. There is scarce rainfall in Mecca..... | 10 |
| 13. Questions concerning Abraham & Ishmael..... | 10 |
| Conclusion | 11 |
| The Qibla Question | 11 |
| The importance of holy places in ancient Arabia | 11 |
| Haram places in Arabia..... | 12 |
| Pilgrimages | 13 |
| The importance of the direction of prayer (qibla) | 14 |
| The changing of the Muslim qibla | 15 |
| Surprising Results | 15 |
| Conclusion | 16 |
| The Changing of the Qibla: Interactive Timeline | 16 |
| Petra Map: Indicators that Petra was the Holy City | 17 |
| The First Qibla: Jerusalem or Petra? | 18 |
| Arguments for Jerusalem | 18 |
| Arguments against the Jerusalem evidence given above | 18 |
| Arguments for Petra | 21 |
| A Timeline of the Becca/Petra Valley | 22 |

PROBLEMS WITH MECCA

Gibson's book: *Qur'anic Geography* examines many geographical issues in the Qur'ān. In the final section of his book he comes to the city of Mecca which is mentioned once in Sūra 48. Qur'ānic commentators have traditionally linked the location of Bekka (or 'the place of the one who weeps much') in Sūra 3:96 with Mecca as well. (Pickthal 3:96, note) Added to this, there are numerous references in the Qur'ān to the sacred place, the Ka'ba, and the house; terms which are universally associated with Mecca today. Nevertheless, the Qur'ān itself does not tell us in so many words that the Ka'ba was located in Mecca. So in this section we will see to what extent historical documents support this commonly held view.

And he it is who hath withheld men's hands from you, and hath withheld your hands from them, in the valley of Mecca, after he had made you victors over them. Allāh is Seer of what ye do. Sūra 48:24 (Pickthal)

Behold, the first temple (house) ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah: rich in blessing, and a [source of] guidance unto all the worlds. Qur'ān 3:96 (Asad)

Muslim scholars have seen no reason to doubt what is commonly believed about Mecca's location, but in recent years, some historians have raised questions. For example, Dr. Patricia Crone in *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* noted that the descriptions of Mecca in Islamic literature don't seem to match the present day location of Mecca. Dr. Crone first authored a book with Michael Cook called *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, in which they proposed a theory that 'Islam, as represented by contemporary, Non-Muslim sources, was in essence a tribal rebellion against the Byzantine and Persian empires with deep roots in Judaism, and that Arabs and Jews were allies in these conquering communities.' (Sean Gannon 2008-12-04, 'The gospel truth?' The Jerusalem Post). This theory received much attention and eventually strong opposition, so much so that Crone's later arguments about Mecca were obscured and eventually lost to the wider Muslim audience. Gibson discovered that when discussing early Islamic history with Muslim scholars that as soon as one mentioned Dr. Crone, the conversation immediately focuses on the 'Hagarism' theory, often with bitter comments and angry reactions, and it became impossible for them to address the thoughts presented in her later works.

In chapter sixteen of his book, Gibson raises some of the same objections that Dr. Crone proposes, but he tries to make it clear that he does not hold to the Hagarism theory that she and Cook presented earlier.

So on this webpage we will examine several problems which exist with the location of the city of Mecca, and will explore the possibility that Mecca was originally located elsewhere and later moved to its present location.

Early descriptions of the Holy City

Gibson first became aware that this was an issue when talking to devout Muslims who had returned from their first *hajj* (pilgrimage). Some voiced their surprise at the smallness of Mecca's mountains, the distance they were from the city, and expressed a vague dissatisfaction with Mecca in general. Somehow they were disappointed that it wasn't what they had imagined from the picture that formed in their minds when reading the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīths. This caused Him to wonder if they had wrong expectations because they had misinterpreted the passages, or if the passages themselves said something that did not match the location. In the following section we will look at some of the concepts people have gained from reading early Islamic literature, and note how the present location of Mecca doesn't seem to match these descriptions.

1. Described as the 'mother of all cities' ☞

This is a term which brings to mind either a large and impressive city or a city of great antiquity.

And this is a book which we have revealed bringing blessings and confirming (the revelations) which came before it: that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities (Mecca) and all around her. Those who believe in the hereafter believe in this (book) and they are constant in guarding their prayers. Sūra 6:92 (Yūsuf 'Alī)

The term *mother of all cities* (Umm al-Qura) is still used for Mecca. (Serageldin, I. Shluger, E. and Martin-Brown, J., 2001, pg 8) and Muslim scholars try to point out that it is worthy of this description. Additionally, some modern scientists say that the city of Makkah is the center of earth in terms of gravity.

Makkah also falls at the ratio of phi (the mathematical golden ratio) between the north and south poles. The above are scientific theories that are not mentioned in the Islamic scripts. However, what is mentioned is that Makkah is the mother of all cities.

In 2002 Gibson had the opportunity to visit the Second Conference on Nabataean Studies held in Petra, Jordan, and organized by the Al Hussein Bin Talal University. During the conference he had occasion to speak with several leading Jordanian and Saudi archeologists. He asked them specifically about the archeological record in and around Mecca. While not wishing to be quoted or named publicly, they admitted that the archeological record at Mecca was basically non-existent before 900 AD. Gibson had expected them to defend the 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.' •

2. Described as the 'center of the trade route' ☞

There are numerous occasions where caravans are mentioned as coming and going from the Holy City, and indeed Muḥammad's uncle Abū Ṭālib was a merchant who regularly sent caravans on trading missions. (Ishāq, page 79) Later, Muḥammad married Khadīja who also managed caravans of camels. (Ishāq 119, page 82) Still later when living in Medina, Muḥammad would raid Meccan caravans, some which consisted of as many as three thousand men. (Al Ṭabarī VII, page 110) While Muslims are adamant that Mecca was the center of the trade route, modern historians give us a different picture. Dr. Patricia Crone tells us:

'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 Ṭā'if? Mecca did, of course, have both a well and a sanctuary, but so did Ṭā'if, which had food supplies, too' ☞. (Crone, 1987 page 6-7; Crone-Cook, 1977, page 22)

Furthermore, Dr. Crone 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 city in a peripheral site bereft of natural resources?' • (Crone, 1987, page 7)

Muslims and some western scholars have imagined that the caravans carried incense, spices, and other exotic goods, but according to research by Kister and Sprenger, the age of frankincense was over and the Arabs now engaged in a trade of leather and clothing; hardly items which could have founded a commercial empire of international dimensions. (Kister 1965, page 116; Sprenger, 1869, page 94) In seminars on pre-Islamic Arabia, Gibson has often traced the various trade routes on a map of Arabia. Then he asks the audience to indicate where all the trade routes

intersect. This would naturally seem to be the 'center of the trade route.' Inevitably, everyone responds that they intersect in northern Arabia, not at Mecca which was not even a stopping place on the caravan routes.

3. Mecca missing on early maps

One would expect that a major merchant city in Arabia would be mentioned on early maps. Such maps never claimed to show every village and settlement, but certainly sought to place significant and famous cities. Surprising as it may seem, not one map before 900 AD even mentions Mecca. This is 300 years after Muḥammad's death.

Over the years Gibson has gathered copies of many ancient maps of Arabia and has diligently had them translated and transcribed, but never once did he find Mecca mentioned on an early map. An often quoted example of this is Ptolomy's map of Arabia. Some of the locations are transcribed on a map in *Qur'anic Geography*. Mecca is never shown, and indeed the mention of Mecca does not appear in any literature prior to 740 AD (approximately 122 years after the Hijra) when it first appears in the *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica*. (See page 267 and Appendix A, and page 396 in *Qur'anic Geography*)

4. The Meccan valley

The Qur'an and the Ḥadīths clearly speak of Mecca being in a valley, and as having another valley next to the Ka'ba (possibly a stream bed).

While they were in this state Abū Jandal bin Suhail bin 'Amr came from the valley of Mecca staggering with his fetters and fell down amongst the Muslims. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 3:891)

And he it is who hath withheld men's hands from you, and hath withheld your hands from them, in the valley of Mecca, after He had made you victors over them. Allāh is Seer of what ye do. (Sūra 48:24, Pickthall)

Al Bukhārī 4.583 tells us that when Abraham cast out Hagar,

he took her to a valley beside the Ka'ba. Abraham brought her and her son Ishmael while she was suckling him, to a place near the Ka'ba under a tree on the spot of Zamzam, at the highest place in the mosque. During those days there was nobody in Mecca, nor was there any water. So he made them sit over there and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates, and a small water-skin containing some water, and set out homeward. Ishmael's mother followed him saying, 'O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to enjoy)?' She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him, 'Has Allāh ordered you to do so?' He said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Then he will not neglect us,' and returned while Abraham proceeded onwards, and on reaching the Thaniya (a crack in the rock) where they could not see him, he faced the Ka'ba, and raising both hands, invoked Allāh saying the following prayers. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 4:583)

When the Prophet performed the ṭawāf of the Ka'ba, he did Ramal during the first three rounds and in the last four rounds he used to walk and while doing ṭawāf between Ṣafa and Marwa, he used to run in the midst of the rain water passage. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:685)

This is a very important verse is helping us to disqualify Mecca and accept Petra as a valid solution. Al Bukhārī « tells us that rain used to run in a passage between these two mountains, and that Muhammad would walk between the two mountains in a rain water passage. If you think about this for a moment, this is a very unique description. Usually water runs between two

mountains but never from one mountain to another. In essence the Holy City was in a valley which contained a water passage that ran from one mountain to the other. In other words, it was located in a large valley, and beside the Ka'ba was a small valley with a stream in it. This is quite different from modern day Mecca. We will visit this later, and discover that this is an exact description of a very unique feature of the city of Petra.

5. Mecca's mountains don't seem quite right

Later the Holy City is described as surrounded by mountains where people could look down into the city to see the Yemeni elephant attacking the Ka'ba. (Ibn Ishāq 939, page 25) In other words, the mountains were close enough to Mecca and the Ka'ba that the people of Mecca could watch from the mountaintops and see details of what was happening. In Mecca today the nearest small outcropping of rocks is half a kilometer away from the Ka'ba with a gradual slope to the top. There are no recorded fortifications on this mountain. The rest of the mountains are three or more kilometers away. Would an elephant even be visible at a distance of 3 km? How much could you actually see? Mecca is situated at an elevation of 277 meters above sea level in the wide dry river beds of the Wadi Ibrāhīm and several of its short tributaries. It is surrounded by low mountains.

While the mountains around Mecca are impressive, the photos and drawings in Gibson's book demonstrate how far away the mountains are from the city centre. The main wadi (valley) lies some 10 - 15 km away, meaning that Mecca is not in the actual wadi. Throughout the year this wadi is dry and only flows during seasonal rains in the mountains. In ancient times there was no natural flow of water through the village of Mecca.

Entrance to the area is gained through five wide passes in the surrounding mountains. These passes lead from the northeast to Jebal Min & Jebal 'Arafat; from the northwest to a coastal road to Medina; from the west to Jeddah on the coast; and from the south to Yemen. The gaps have also defined the direction of the contemporary expansion of the city.

Many pilgrims have been disappointed with the two mountains called Şafa and Marwah. They are so small that today they are totally enclosed inside of the mosque building complex.



Note the Ka'ba in the center of the mosque complex. To the right is a long straight walkway that leads to Jebal Şafa on one side and Jebal Marwah on the other (top to bottom of the photo below.)

The two mountains are so small that they are totally enclosed inside the building, allowing pilgrims to walk between them. Now note these verses that describe the mountains of Şafa and Marwah that supposedly has a rainwater passage between them:

The Apostle of Allāh (peace be upon him) came and entered Mecca, and after the Apostle of Allāh (peace be upon him) had gone forward to the stone, and touched it, he went round the house (the Ka'ba). He then went to as-Şafa and climbed it so that he could look down at the house. Then he raised his hands began to make mention of Allāh as much as he wished and make supplication. The narrator said: The Anşār were beneath him. The narrator Hashim said: He prayed and praised Allāh and asked him for what he wished to ask. (Sunan of Abū Dawood 750)

Ar-Rabi' ibn Saburah said on the authority of his father (Saburah): We went out along with the Apostle of Allāh (peace be upon him) till we reached Uşfan, Suraqah ibn Mālik al-Mudlaji said to him: Apostle of Allāh , explain to us like the people as if they were born today. He said: Allāh , the exalted, has included this umrah in your Hajj. When you come (to Mecca), and he who goes round the house (the Ka'ba), and runs between as-Şafa and al-Marwah, is allowed to take off Iḥrām except he who has brought the sacrificial animals with him. (Sunan of Abū Dawood 727)

And when he (Muḥammad) reached Mecca on the 4th of Dhū al-Ḥijja he performed the ṭawāf round the Ka'ba and performed á'awaf between Şafa and Marwa. (Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:617)

When the Prophet performed the ṭawāf of the Ka'ba, he did Ramal during the first three rounds and in the last four rounds he used to walk and while doing ṭawāf between Şafa and Marwa, he used to run in the midst of the rain water passage. (Şaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:685) (See page 285)

The ritual of passing between the two mountains is supposedly based on Hagar, the wife of Abraham looking for water for baby Ishmael. Note how Şafa and Marwa seem to be mountains on either side of a large valley, not two little hillocks within a shallow valley.

When the water in the water-skin had all been used up, she (Hagar) became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at him (i.e. Ishmael) tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at him, and found that the mountain of Şafa was the nearest mountain to her on that land. She stood on it and started looking at the valley keenly so that she might see somebody, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from Şafa and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. She repeated that (running between Şafa and Marwa) seven times. (Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 4:583,4)

This is repeated in the Fiqh us-Sunnah, but here it is added that Hagar struggled to cross the valley between the two mountains:

Hagar sat under the tree with her baby next to her. She drank from her water container hanging nearby, and nursed her baby, until all the water she had was gone, her milk dried out. Her son grew hungrier and hungrier. She could hardly bear to look at him. She went and stood at Şafa - the mountain nearest to her. She looked down the valley to see if there was someone around to help. She could see no one. So, she climbed down Şafa and reached the valley. She struggled hard, crossed the valley and reached Marwah. She stood on Marwah, and looked around. Still she could see no one around. She repeated this seven times. Ibn 'Abbās added, 'The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'It is (to commemorate this walk) that pilgrims walk between Şafa and Marwah.' • (Fiqh us-Sunnah 5:85)

Şafa Mountain was also high enough to be a lookout position for defense of Mecca as noted in the following Ḥadīth: When the verse: 'And warn your tribe of near kindred.' ﴿۲۶﴾ (26:214) was revealed,

Allāh's Apostle went out, and when he had ascended al-Şafa mountain, he shouted, 'O Sabahah! ' Then the people said, 'Who is that?' ' Then they gathered around him, whereupon he said, 'Do you see? If I inform you that cavalymen are proceeding up the side of this mountain, will you believe me?' ' They said, 'We have never heard you telling a lie.' ' Then he said, 'I am a plain warner to you of a coming severe punishment. ' Abū Lahab said, 'May you perish! You gathered us only for this reason?' ' Then Abū Lahab went away. So the Sūrat: 'Perish the hands of Abū Lahab! ' was revealed. (Şaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 6:495)

Note that in the times before Islam two idols or places of worship existed: one on top of Mount Şafa and the other on top of Mount Marwah. Today there is no evidence of these idols, neither idol bases nor inscriptions. Şafa and Marwah as they used to do in the days of Jahiliyya while two idols were set on top of Şafa and Marwah. (Fiqh us-Sunnah 5:86)

'Amr set up an image on al-Şafa called Nahlik Mujawid al-Rih and one on al-Marwa called Mut'im al-Tayr. (Işhāq 56, pg 30)

The trip between the two mountains was so strenuous that some people could not do the seven crossings in one day: The author of Al-Mughni observes:

Aḥmad says there is no harm in delaying the Sa'i after performing ṭawāf until one is rested, or postponing it until evening. 'Ata and al-Ḥasan also see no harm in someone making ṭawāf early in the day and postponing the Sa'i between Şafa and Marwah until evening. Al-Qāsim and Sa'id bin Jubair followed this, because the continuity of Sa'i is, as such, not a condition, much less the continuity of ṭawāf and Sa'i. Sa'id bin Maṣūūr reported that Saudah, the wife of 'Urwah bin al-Zubair performed Sa'i in between Şafa and Marwah and because she was a big and heavy woman, she completed it in three days. (Fiqh us-Sunnah 5:88a)

Climbing Şafa and Marwah and making supplications for one's material and spiritual well being and welfare is encouraged. During the supplications one should face the Ka'ba. It is well known that the Prophet (peace be upon him) went through the Şafa Gate, and on approaching Şafa he recited the Qur'anic verse 2.158 'Verily, Şafa and Marwah are among the symbols of Allāh ' and then saying 'I begin with what Allāh himself began ' he climbed Şafa until he could see the Ka'ba from where he stood. He faced the Ka'ba, thrice proclaimed Allāh's oneness, glorified him, praised him, and then said, 'There is no deity worthy of worship except Allāh. He has no partners. To him belongs the kingdom and all praise. He alone grants life and causes death, he has power over all things. There is no God but he. He has fulfilled his promise, given victory to his servant, and he alone defeated the confederates.' • Thrice he made similar supplications. Then he walked toward Marwah and climbed it, until he could see the Ka'ba. There he made supplications as he had at Şafa. (Fiqh us-Sunnah 5:90)

Today there is no evidence of an ancient gate at Sufa, nor walls, nor stairs to climb the mountain.

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

Allāh's Apostle used to enter Mecca from the high thaniya and used to leave Mecca from the low thaniya. (Şaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:645) A thaniya is a narrow mountain pass. eg: The Prophet went on advancing till he reached the thaniya (i.e. a mountainous way) through which one would go to them (i.e. people of Quraish). (Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 3:891)

When the Prophet came to Mecca he entered from its higher side and left from its lower side. (Şaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:647) This is mentioned many more times 2:645 and 2:657.

We ('Ā'isha speaking) set out with the Prophet with the intention of performing Ḥajj only. The Prophet reached Mecca and performed ṭawāf of the Ka'ba and between Şafa and Marwah and did not finish the Iḥrām, because he had the Hādī with him. His companions and his wives performed ṭawāf (of the Ka'ba and between Şafa and Marwah), and those who had no Hādī with them finished their Iḥrām. I got the menses and performed all the ceremonies of al-Ḥajj. So, when the Night of Ḥasba (night of departure) came, I said, 'O Allāh's Apostle! All your companions are

returning with Ḥajj and 'umra except me. ۞ He asked me, 'Didn't you perform ṭawāf of the Ka'ba ('umra) when you reached Mecca?' ۞ I said, 'No.' • He said, 'Go to Tan'im with your brother 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and assume Iḥrām for 'umra and I will wait for you at such and such a place. ۞ So I went with 'Abd al-Raḥmān to Tan'im and assumed Iḥrām for 'umra. Then Ṣāfiya bint Huyay got menses. The Prophet said, 'Aqra Ḥalqa! You will detain us! Didn't you perform ṭawāf al-īfāda on the Day of Nahr (slaughtering)?' ۞ She said, 'Yes, I did. ۞ He said, 'Then there is no harm, depart. ۞ So I met the Prophet when he was ascending the heights towards Mecca and I was descending, or vice-versa. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:815)

Ibn 'Umar used to spend the night at Dhi-Tuwa in between the two thaniyas and then he would enter Mecca through the thaniya which is at the higher region of Mecca, and whenever he came to Mecca for Ḥajj or 'umra, he never made his she-camel kneel down except near the gate of the Masjid (Sacred Mosque) and then he would enter (it) and go to the Black (stone) corner and start from there circumambulating the Ka'ba seven times: hastening in the first three rounds (Ramal) and walking in the last four. On finishing, he would offer two Rakat prayer and set out to perform ṭawāf between Ṣafa and Marwa before returning to his dwelling place. On returning (to Medina) from ḥajj or 'umra, he used to make his camel kneel down at Al-Batha which is at Dhū al-Ḥulayfa, the place where the Prophet used to make his camel kneel down. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2:820)

During the year of the conquest (of Mecca), the Prophet entered Mecca through its upper part through Kada. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 5:586)

That she said, 'O Allāh's Apostle! Your companions are returning with the reward of both ḥajj and 'umra, while I am returning with (the reward of) ḥajj only. ۞ He said to her, 'Go, and let 'Abd al-Raḥmān (i.e. your brother) make you sit behind him (on the animal). ۞ So, he ordered 'Abd al-Raḥmān to let her perform 'umra from Al-Tan'im. Then the Prophet waited for her at the higher region of Mecca till she returned. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 4:227)

Allāh's Apostle came to Mecca through its higher region on the day of the conquest (of Mecca) riding his she-camel on which Usāma was riding behind him. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 4:231)

Now al-Khaṭṭāb had so harassed Zayd that he forced him to withdraw to the upper part of Mecca, and he stopped in the mountain of Ḥīra, facing the town. (Iṣḥāq 148, pg 102) It is interesting to note that Mount Ḥīra was located in the 'upper part of Mecca.' • However, today Mount Ḥīra is a considerable distance from the Ka'ba. (see page 226 in *Qur'anic Geography*)

Today Mecca is located in a large open area, with low rocky mountains rising from the sand. Thus it is my belief that the early descriptions of Mecca and its mountains do not fit the Mecca of today.

7. Grass grew in the original Holy City valley

(Muḥammad) would go forth for his affairs and journey far afield until he reached the glens of Mecca and the beds of its valleys where no house was in site. (Iṣḥāq 151, pg 105)

One night the Prophet was unable to sleep and said, 'Would that a righteous man from my companions guarded me tonight. ۞ Suddenly we heard the clatter of arms, whereupon the Prophet said, 'Who is it?' ۞ It was said, 'I am Sa'd, O Allāh's Apostle! I have come to guard you. ۞ The Prophet then slept so soundly that we heard him snoring. Abū 'Abdullāh said: 'Ā'isha said: Bilal said, 'Would that I but stayed overnight in a valley with Idhkhir and Jalil (two kinds of grass) around me (i.e., in Mecca). ۞ Then I told that to the Prophet. (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 9:337)

It is hard to believe that this was written about the Mecca we know today, as the area around Mecca is completely desert sand where no grass grows naturally, nor is there any evidence that the area was ever irrigated and able to support grass and fields in the past.

8. The original Holy City had clay and loam

Al Ṭabarī relates the story (The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume VI, 1079, pg 6) of how ‘Abd Allāh , the father of Muḥammad visited a wife whom he had in addition to Aminah bint Wahb ibn ‘Abd Manaf ibn Zuhrah. He had been working in the soil and traces of soil were still on him when he invited her to lie with him. She made him wait because of this. He went out, performed his ablutions, washed off the clay which was on him and went to Aminah’s quarters instead. And so Muḥammad was conceived. R. B. Serjeant in his comments on Alfred Guillaume’s translation of the same story in the Sirah (Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, xxi, 1958, pages1-14) is puzzled by this discrepancy as the Arabic word used here specifically means a cultivated plot or field, and refers to clay and loam. He then notes that there was no cultivable land near Mecca. (See Ishāq, page 69) Once again, the ancient description doesn’t match what archeologists have found.

9. The original Holy City had trees

Once when I was with the Prophet in Mecca and we went out into one of its districts in the neighbourhood, not a mountain or tree which confronted him failed to say, ‘Peace be upon you, Messenger of Allāh. ʾ Tirmidhi and Darimi transmitted it. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhi Ḥadīth 1535)

This is an interesting reference to both ‘districts of Mecca’ and ‘trees.’ The ancient village of Mecca left a very small archeological footprint and didn’t have much for districts, let alone trees. This is reinforced by Sīrat Rasūl Allāh , 72 (Guillaume, 2006, pg 46) *When they came to Mecca they saw a town blessed with water and trees and delighted with it, they settled there.* Ibn Ishāq mentions trees again a little later when he tells us that the people of Mecca *were reluctant to cut down trees in the sacred area.* (Guillaume, 2006, pg 53) The presence of trees and plants in ancient times can be easily tested by the presence of spores and pollens in undisturbed ancient soil. To date there is no record of trees having ever existed in ancient Mecca.

10. The original Holy City had grapes growing in it

By Allāh , I never saw a prisoner better than Khubaib. By Allāh , one day I saw him eating of a bunch of grapes in his hand while he was chained in irons, and this was not the time of fruit in Mecca.’ • (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 4:281)

Here we have reference to the ancient Holy City having trees and fruit growing in and around it. Once again, it is hard to imagine this happening where Mecca is located today.

11. The Holy City produced large armies

Apparently Mecca had no trouble in raising large numbers of men to work large caravans and march in their armies. The following chart is information gleaned from Al Ṭabarī’s History.

| Source | Year | Event | Size of Meccan Army |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--|
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 13 | Year 1 | Expedition to Al Abwa | 300 Meccan horsemen |
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 15-16 | Year 2 | Raid on Meccan caravan | 100 Meccan men, 2,500 camels in the caravan. |
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 33 | Year 2 | Battle of Badr | 1000 Meccan soldiers |
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 90 | Year 2 | Expedition of al-Sawiq | 200 Meccan soldiers |
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 98 | Year 3 | Expedition to al-Qaradah | 20,000 dirham captured from Meccan caravan. |
| Al-Ṭabarī VII, pg 110 | Year 3 | Expedition to Uḥud | 3000 Meccan soldiers, 200 cavalry |
| Al-Ṭabarī VIII, pg 13 | Year 5 | Battle of the Trench, | associated tribes, 10,000 Quraysh soldiers |

When one considers the number of soldiers and camels that the Meccans could raise despite their losses in battles year after year, one would expect the Holy City to be a large city. However, archeological evidence points to Mecca being a small place in a harsh environment. How then could it have produced such armies?

12. There is scarce rainfall in Mecca

Mecca averages 4.3 inches of rain per year (11 cm). With its high desert temperatures and barren conditions, this is scarcely enough to grow any vegetation at all, let alone grow enough food to support a large population.

13. Questions concerning Abraham & Ishmael

The Jews have always been great keepers and guardians of their ancient documents. Their records clearly trace in detail the travels of Abraham who is considered the father of the Jewish people. There is no evidence that this history was ever contested before Islam came on the scene, so there is no reason to suppose that the record had been intentionally falsified. Why then do the biblical records not include Abraham's trips into Arabia that are referenced by Islamic scholars? Admittedly, there are periods of Abraham's life for which the biblical documents give no detail, but if there were important journeys undertaken it would be surprising if they were not mentioned. The Bible recognizes no polemic against Ishmael in ancient times. Of course, it may be argued that no evidence is needed. If God has revealed that Abraham went to Mecca, then he did so, no questions asked. That still leaves us with the question as to why it is stated in the Qur'an as though it was a known fact.

And when we made the house (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And we imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael, (saying): Purify my house for those who go around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship). And when Abraham prayed: My Lord! Make this a region of security and bestow upon its people fruits, such of them as believe in Allāh and the Last Day, he answered: As for him who disbelieveth, I shall leave him in contentment for a while, then I shall compel him to the doom of fire--a hapless journey's end! And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the house, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only thou, art the hearer, the knower. (Sūra 2:125-127 Pickthall)

Allāh speaketh truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. He was not of the idolaters. Lo! the first sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples; Wherein are plain memorials (of Allāh's guidance); the place where Abraham stood up to pray; and whosoever entereth it is safe. And pilgrimage to the house is a duty unto Allāh for mankind, for him who can find a way thither. As for him who disbelieveth, (let him know that) Lo! Allāh is independent of (all) creatures. (Sūra 3: 95 & 96 Pickthall)

If Islamic sources are correct in saying that Abraham journeyed to Mecca, it is surprising that there is no reference to this event in the biblical history. It would have required many months of difficult travel. If the Bible is correct, then it is surprising that Islam gives such a different view. Is there a possibility that the divergence is narrower than it appears? It is Gibson's belief that if we can discover the original location of the Holy City of Islam and the location of the first Ka'ba, that it might also answer the questions and objections that historians have raised for years about associating Abraham with the Holy City of Islam.

Conclusion

So what have we learned from this page? While we have presented no conclusive evidence, we have tried to demonstrate that there are some discrepancies between the ancient descriptions of Mecca and what archeology and historians have learned about the current location of Mecca. Keep these things in the back of your mind as we move on to discuss the pilgrimages in Arabia in the page and see what conclusions Gibson comes to.

<http://searchformecca.com/qibla.html>

The Qibla Question

Commonly accepted Islamic history states that the Ka'ba was a major shrine, and Mecca was a major city and the focus of pilgrimage in Arabia. As we have already seen, the archaeology of Mecca casts some doubt on it being Islam's original Holy City. But what can we learn about pilgrimages from other sources in Arabia?

The importance of holy places in ancient Arabia

From ancient times, Middle Eastern religions have equated gods with locations rather than peoples. Modern readers of history have long been influenced by monotheistic ideas and have often failed to realize the significance that the ancient people applied to "regional gods." In other words, rather than thinking in terms of tribes or clans who had their own gods, many gods were recognized as having regional significance and were respected by visitors passing through their area. Thus the Mesopotamians had their gods, the Egyptians had their gods, the Greeks and Romans respectively had their gods, and so the Arabs also had their own gods. Arab gods were understood as having sacred locations, and so often a particular god was mainly worshiped in a particular place, not universally throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

As great nations and empires rose to power, they sometimes tried to export the worship of their local gods to other places. This can be seen in the story of the invasion of Sennacherib's army into Judah. The Assyrian king sent his representative (rabsheqeh) to Jerusalem to challenge the Jews into submission. He refers to several local gods during his speech in which he shouts his message to the Jewish people on the city walls:

"Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'Jehovah will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can Jehovah deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" (Isaiah 36:18-20)

When considering pre-Islamic Arabia, it is important to recognize that the Nabataeans did not so much universally worship a pantheon of gods as much as multiple gods each attached to a specific location. Therefore the gods worshiped in Petra were not necessarily the same gods worshiped in Hijra or Tā'if. For instance, worship of the God Hubal was mostly restricted to Hijra (Healy, 2001, page 37) Likewise al-Kutba is distinctively North Arabian, and al-Uzza of the Hijaz. Originally each deity had its own temple and religious practices attached to it. In time however, the worship of some of the Arabian deities spread to nearby areas. The Nabataeans

seemed content with their practice of worshiping local gods, and never attempted to actively export the worship of any of their deities to other peoples.

There was a good reason for this particular view of the sacred. The Nabataeans were merchants. They traveled widely, and one would assume that to please their hosts in foreign lands, they would leave a token of respect at the foreigner's temples. Thus, when in Edom, one would leave an offering at the temple of Dushara, the god of the Edomite mountains. When in Egypt, they might leave an offering at the temple of Isis. Respecting local gods would go a long ways towards building trust which would lead to business relations. Thus, early in Nabataean history, gods were considered local gods and one must respect them when passing through their territory.

Such a view of religion naturally leads to accepting territories and locations as being sacred to specific gods. Thus, the area around a temple, a specific valley or remote desert location, could be considered as sacred. When modern tourists enter the majestic beauty of Wadi Rum in southern Jordan, they marvel at the unique splendor of that remote location. Many tourists are so taken in by the wild desert scenery as it stands in stark contrast to the rugged rocks and mountains, that they miss the Nabataean temple dedicated to the goddess Lat (Allat). When viewing Arabia as a whole, it is possible to deduce that throughout the Arabian peninsula the gods of Arabia each had particular places where they resided. These were sacred precincts, and were places of refuge and security where regular activities ceased and violence was forbidden.

Ḥaram places in Arabia

The Qur'ān, Hadīths and Islamic histories often refer to the mosque in the original Islamic Holy City as *masjid al ḥaram* (the forbidden gathering place).

An example of this is found in Sūra 17:1: "Glory be to him who took his devotee one night from Masjid-al-Ḥaram to Masjid-al-Aqṣa, whose vicinity we have blessed, so that we may show him some of our signs: surely he is the one who is the hearer, the observer." (Qur'ān 17:1, Mālik)

Indeed the entire area around the Holy City was seen as *ḥaram* (forbidden). This had several implications. First, killing was forbidden within this area. "Ibn al-Hanafiyyah said to them "I do not deem it lawful to fight in God's sacred precinct." (Al Ṭabarī XXI, 654, page 61).

This ban extended even to the killing of animals: "The horse of one of them began to drop dung and the pigeons of the sanctuary (al-ḥaram) area started to scavenge in the droppings. Al-Ḥuṣayn reigned back his horse from them and Ibn al-Zubayr said 'What is the matter with you?' He replied "I am afraid lest my horse kill the pigeons of the sanctuary area." Ibn al-Zubayr said, "You would refrain from this sin, and yet you wish to kill Muslims?" Al-Ḥuṣayn answered "I will not fight you, allow us to perform the ritual circumambulation of the sanctuary (al-bayt) and then we will leave you." He did so, and they departed." (Al Ṭabarī Volume XX, 430, pg 2)

Abū Shuraih said, "When 'Amr bin Sa'īd was sending the troops to Mecca (to fight 'Abdullāh bin Az-Zubair) I said to him, 'O chief! Allow me to tell you what the prophet said on the day following the conquests of Mecca. My ears heard and my heart comprehended, and I saw him with my own eyes, when he said it. He glorified and praised Allāh and then said, "Allāh and not the people has made Mecca a sanctuary. So anybody who has belief in Allāh and the Last Day (i.e. a Muslim) should neither shed blood in it nor cut down its trees. If anybody argues that fighting is allowed in Mecca as Allāh's Apostle did fight (in Mecca), tell him that Allāh gave permission to his apostle, but he did not give it to you. The prophet added: Allāh allowed me only for a few hours on that day (of the conquest) and today (now) its sanctity is the same (valid) as it was before. So it is incumbent upon those who are present to convey it (this information) to those who are absent." Abū- Shuraih was asked, "What did 'Amr reply?" He said 'Amr said, "O Abū Shuraih! I know better than you (in this respect). Mecca does not give protection to one who

disobeys (Allāh) or runs after committing murder, or theft (and takes refuge in Mecca).” Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī Ḥadīth 1.104

The prophet said, “Allāh has made Mecca a sanctuary (sacred place) and it was a sanctuary before me and will be so after me. It was made legal for me (to fight in it) for a few hours of the day. None is allowed to uproot its thorny shrubs or to cut its trees or to chase its game or to pick up its fallen things except by a person who announces it publicly.” On that Al-Abbās said (to the Prophet), “Except Al- Idhkhir for our goldsmiths and for our graves.” And so the Prophet added, “Except Al-Idhkhir. “ And Abū Huraira narrated that the Prophet said, “Except Al-Idhkhir for our graves and houses.” And Ibn Abbās said, “For their goldsmiths and houses.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al Bukhārī Ḥadīth 2.432)

Prof. Michal Gawlikowski, who spent 40 years excavating and researching the ancient city of Palmyra, writes the following in his paper “The Sacred Space in Ancient Arab Religions” (Gawlikowski, 1982): “The notion of ḥaram (forbidden) was, in the Arabic traditions, attached to both sanctuaries and burials. In both cases, these places could serve as an asylum and were considered sacred; the same name was also used to describe their character.” He later notes: Several foundation inscriptions from Hijra put it quite clearly that the family rock-cut tombs there were considered ḥaram....There is every reason to believe that the rockcut tombs of Petra did not differ in character from those of Hijra....

Besides the foundation inscription of the Qabr et-Turkman in Petra which is the only one on this site except the late epigraph of Sextius Florentinus, irrelevant for our purpose, is written in exactly the same terms as the Hijra inscriptions, with one notable difference: there are no names except for the divine...”

I have expressed the supposition that there was an interdiction of religious character barring the founders of tombs in Petra from putting their names on their monuments. The fact that the only inscription engraved on a façade there carefully omits these names, but not the mention of consecration to Dushara and other Gods seems to prove the point.”

Gawlikowski goes on to point out that from the Greek historian Diodorus (History XIX, 94, 2-5) we learn that the Nabataeans were forbidden under penalty of death to build houses. He suggests that this was limited to the site of Petra alone, the original ḥaram or “forbidden” area of Arabia. (Gawlikowski, 1982, page 301-303)

So while there were several sacred places in Arabia, two of them, Hijra and Petra, stand out as sacred places where burials also took place. But which of these was the more important of the two? First, Petra is many times larger than Hijra with over 1000 funerary monuments. Second, pilgrimages were made to Petra, thus denoting the importance of Petra as the primary holy place or “forbidden sanctuary” in ancient Arabia.

Pilgrimages

In his book on Nabataean names, Doctor Avraham Negev of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey suggested that much of the Nabataean graffiti found throughout the Negev and southern Jordan was written by people on pilgrimages to Petra. In his detailed study he notes the variety of names that occur in Thamudic, Safaitic, and other early Arabian dialects. (Negev, 1991) The discovery of a zodiac dated to the second century AD leads us to believe that there were two Nabataean pilgrimages. Zodiacs were well known throughout the ancient world. They expressed a belief in the cyclical passage of time and the power of the stars and planets to affect earthly events.

The Nabataean zodiac has many images similar to Roman zodiacs of the time. However, one of the symbols portrays Allat, the female goddess of fertility, with a lance or sword which can faintly be seen above her left shoulder. This may have symbolized an ancient festival which was celebrated by the Nabataeans and their nomadic neighbors when the birthing of lambs marked the spring season. It was a time when grazing was good and the earth was green from the spring rains. The Nabataean equivalent of Sagittarius is rendered as the bust of a jovial youth, possibly al-Kutbay, the god of learning and commerce. Capricorn is shown in the Nabataean panel as the damaged bust of a human figure rather than the traditional Roman fish/goat that was common throughout the Roman Empire. The remaining symbols of the Nabataean zodiac conform to their Roman counterparts, but they are enlivened with original touches of artistic creativity. However, by far the most significant difference in the Nabataean zodiac is the arrangement of the order of the houses within the zodiacal circle.

The Roman version follows the traditional order known today. Beginning at the top and going counter-clockwise, the Roman zodiac runs as follows: (1) Aries, (2) Taurus, (3) Gemini, (4) Cancer, (5) Leo, and (6) Virgo. Then there is a break at the bottom after which the succession resumes with (7) Libra, (8) Scorpio, (9) Sagittarius, (10) Capricorn, (11) Aquarius, and finally (12) Pisces. The Nabataean zodiac found at Khirbet Tannur is different in that it begins counter-clockwise with (1) Aries, (2) Taurus, (3) Gemini, (4) Cancer, (5) Leo, and (6) Virgo. Then there is a break by the nikés head. So far, this is like the Roman version. Following the traditional order, one would expect (7) Libra to be next in the counter-clockwise progression. But this is not so! This space is occupied by (12) Pisces! Instead, the Nabataean Libra appears at the top, beside Aries. This begins a clockwise progression around the zodiacal circle's opposite (left) side; beginning clockwise from (7) Libra at the top, the progression follows in order from (7) to (12) to end at the left side of the niké caryatid's head.

Thus, the Nabataean zodiac is extraordinary in its two opposite and completely separate halves. Some archeologists think that this denotes the existence of two New Year celebrations, one in the spring and the other in the fall, and this might help explain why there were two great festivals at Petra each year.

Al Ṭabarī, the great Islamic historian of 900 AD, notes in volume VI of *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (page 12) that during the days before Islam, there were two pilgrimages. The lesser was known as 'umrah. He notes that 'Abd al-Muttalib (Muḥammad's grandfather) performed 'umrah on one occasion. This was at a time when the forbidden sanctuary held many pagan idols, among them Hubal (Ṭabarī VI, 1075 page 3) and Isaf and Na'ilah (pg 4). The Qur'an tells us that these pre-Islamic pagan pilgrimages were known respectively as ḥajj (Qur'an 2:158, 196) and 'umrah, commonly called the greater and lesser pilgrimage.

From ancient time the Arabian pilgrimage was always to the religious center of Arabia, the forbidden sanctuary, the holy burial city of Petra. It was in this city that the Nabataean dead were buried, and it was in this city that the living gathered to eat a ritual meal with their extended family in the presence of the long departed ancestors. This custom was part of the cultural and ethnic make-up of the Nabataeans, and was the glue that held them, a nomadic merchant people, together as a society. In Petra today visitors can see the gathering halls that are attached to many of the tombs where family gatherings celebrated the living and the dead.

The importance of the direction of prayer (qibla)

Today all mosques are not only aligned to face the direction of prayer, but they all have an architectural feature built in to emphasise it. The direction of prayer is called qibla and every mosque today has a niche (miḥrab) built in the qibla wall to provide clear indication of the direction of Mecca. The very earliest mosques however did not have the miḥrab niche, but were

simply aligned in such a way that when the faithful faced the qibla wall they automatically faced the Holy City of Islam.

Christians today take little notice of the direction they might face when praying. For them, God is present everywhere, and they are free to pray in any direction. Jews also have no prescribed direction of prayer, although some choose to face towards the temple site in Jerusalem based on the words of King Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the temple to Jehovah. (I Kings 8:38-48)

In Islam, it is universally understood that the qibla was changed and this change is referred to in the Qur'an. The text of the Qur'an itself does not give the name of the place to which prayer was originally made, nor to which it was switched, nor when the switch occurred. According to Al Ṭabarī, (Volume VI, 1218, page 132) when the subject of qibla came up during pre-Hijra days, Muḥammad directed them to pray towards Syria. The Qur'an, early ḥadīths and early Islamic histories never say that the qibla was towards Jerusalem.

Mention of Jerusalem as the qibla doesn't appear in Islamic literature until over 300 years after Muḥammad died. All of the early records simply state that Muḥammad prayed towards Syria. If he did pray towards Jerusalem, it would seem strange that the records would not state Jerusalem, since it was a known and important center at the time. Muḥammad continued with his original qibla until February 624 when Islamic sources note that Muḥammad changed the qibla towards Mecca. (Al Ṭabarī Volume 6, page 131 footnote 209) and (Al Ṭabarī Volume VII, page 25) Al Ṭabarī's record mentioning Jerusalem being the focus of prayer was written around the year 920, almost 300 years after the qibla had been changed. By this time the idea of Jerusalem was being circulated, but the Qur'an and the early histories all say that it was towards Syria that Muḥammad prayed.

The changing of the Muslim qibla

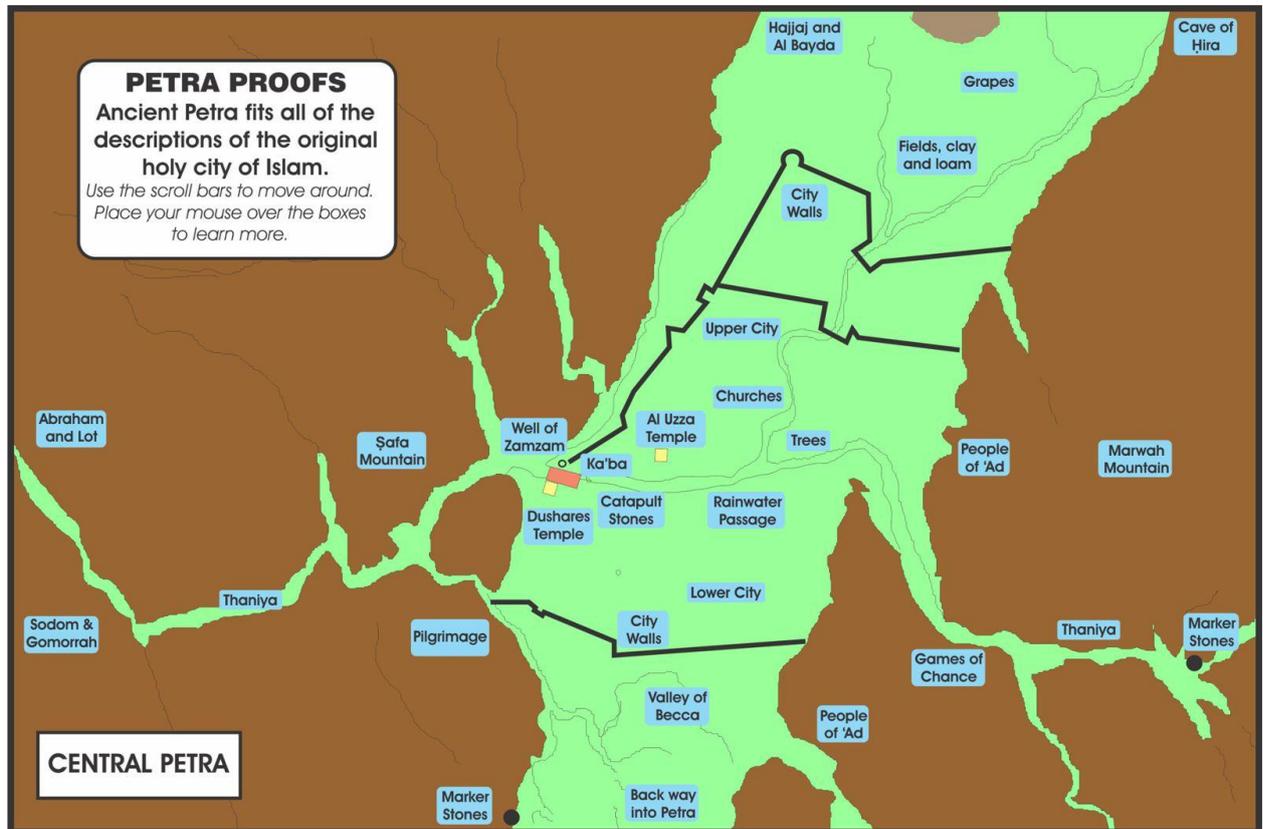
The Qur'an clearly tells us that the qibla was changed during Muḥammad's lifetime. Thus have we made of you an Ummah justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the apostle a witness over yourselves; and we appointed the qibla to which thou wast used only to test those who followed the apostle from those who would turn on their heels (from the faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous except to those guided by Allāh. And never would Allāh make your faith of no effect. For Allāh is to all people most surely full of kindness most merciful. We see the turning of thy face (for guidance) to the heavens; now shall we turn thee to a qibla that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the sacred mosque; wherever ye are turn your faces in that direction. The people of the book know well that that is the truth from their Lord nor is Allāh unmindful of what they do. Even if thou wert to bring to the people of the book all the signs (together) they would not follow thy qibla; nor art thou going to follow their qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's qibla. If thou after the knowledge hath reached thee wert to follow their (vain) desires then wert thou indeed (clearly) in the wrong. (Sūra 2.143-145, Yusuf Alī)

Since Muḥammad revealed the Qur'an, then this text from the Qur'an indicates that the qibla was changed during Muḥammad's lifetime. However, no place names are given, and it seems to be assumed that all religions have qiblas. Archeology backs up the changing of the qibla. There are many early mosques that faced a direction other than where Mecca is today. In the next chapter these early mosques are individually examined, photographed, and dates assigned to their construction.

Surprising Results

I began my study of early mosques thinking that I would be able to use the first handful of mosques built during Muḥammad's lifetime to determine the original focus of Muḥammad's

Petra Map: Indicators that Petra was the Holy City



The First Qibla: Jerusalem or Petra?

Did the original qibla point to Jerusalem or to Petra? The traditional view is that Jerusalem was the original focus of Muhammad's prayers, and that later he changed his direction of prayer towards Mecca. Here are the arguments.

Arguments for Jerusalem

1. Jerusalem is mentioned in Islamic literature as the focus of the first qibla. This was first recorded about 250 after Muhammad, where Bukhārī records: *We prayed along with the Prophet facing Jerusalem for sixteen or seventeen months. Then Allāh ordered him to turn his face towards the qibla (in Mecca): "And from whence-so-ever you start forth (for prayers) turn your face in the direction of (the Sacred Mosque of Mecca) Al-Masjid-al ḥaram..."* (2.149) Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 6:19

2. The Qur'an mentions that the original holy place of Islam was called Bakka. Bekka is Jerusalem. Sura 3:96 tells us: *Undoubtedly the first House for the worship of Allah ever built for mankind is the one at Bakka, a blessed site and a guidance for all the worlds.* (F. Malik Translation)

From Psalm 84 it can be deduced that Bekka was a place near Jerusalem. *Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.* (Psalm 84: 5-6, KJV)

3. Jerusalem is city that is recognized by Jews and Christians as a place of pilgrimage. Jews went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Christians began to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem around 300 AD, once the Byzantine Empire began to take shape.

4. There is an early mosque that faced Jerusalem known as the Mosque of the Two Qiblas in Medina.

This mosque maintained a qibla that pointed to the old direction as well as one that pointed to Mecca. The old Qibla pointed at Jerusalem.

5. This explains why Muhammad was preoccupied with fighting the Byzantines. Muhammad marched north with his armies to invade Byzantine land, rather than around Arabia to conquer the Arabs. This makes sense if his goal was to capture Jerusalem.

6. Jerusalem is considered the third holiest city by the Muslims. First is Mecca, then Medina, and third is Jerusalem.

7. Muhammad's night journey was to Jerusalem. During his miraculous night journey, Muhammad went from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night.

Arguments against the Jerusalem evidence given above

1. Jerusalem mentioned in Islamic literature: Despite his best efforts in making us believe that Jerusalem was the original focus of worship, Bukhārī had trouble keeping his facts straight. In one passage he tells us that the original qibla direction was towards Syria (Damascus) and in another place he says it was towards Jerusalem. As we mentioned, Bukhārī records the original qibla as being Jerusalem. This hadith is quoted many times when defending the Jerusalem option.

We prayed along with the Prophet facing Jerusalem for sixteen or seventeen months. Then Allāh ordered him to turn his face towards the qibla (in Mecca): "And from whence-so-ever you start forth (for prayers) turn your face in the direction of (the Sacred Mosque of Mecca) Al-Masjid-al ḥaram..." (2.149) Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 6:19

While some people were offering morning prayer at Quba' a man came to them and said, "A Qur'anic order has been revealed to Allāh's Apostle tonight that he should face the Ka'ba at Mecca (in prayer), so you too should turn your faces towards it." At that moment their faces were towards Shām. (This is the Arab name for Damascus, which also means "north" Wehr page 525) (and on hearing that) they turned towards the Ka'ba (at Mecca). Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 6:17.

A strong indication of the meaning of the word "Sham" is found a few pages later in Bukhārī when he clearly identifies Damascus (the center of Marwān's power) as "Sham":

"When Ibn Ziyād and Marwān were in Sham and Ibn Az-Zubair took over the authority in Mecca and Qurra' (the Khārijites) revolted in Baṣra, I went out with my father to Abū Barza al-Aslami till we entered upon him in his house while he was sitting in the shade of a room built of cane. So we sat with him and my father started talking to him saying, "O Abū Barza! Don't you see in what dilemma the people have fallen?" The first thing heard him saying, "I seek reward from Allāh for myself because of being angry and scornful at the Quraysh tribe. O you Arabs! You know very well that you were in misery and were few in number and misguided, and that Allāh has brought you out of all that with Islam and with Muḥammad till he brought you to this state (of prosperity and happiness) which you see now; and it is this worldly wealth and pleasures which has caused mischief to appear among you. The one who is in Sham (i.e., Marwān), by Allāh, is not fighting except for the sake of worldly gain: and those who are among you, by Allāh, are not fighting except for the sake of worldly gain; and that one who is in Mecca (i.e., Ibn Az-Zubair) by Allāh, is not fighting except for the sake of worldly gain." Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī Ḥadīth 9:228

So where did the first qibla point to? Gibson believes that it pointed towards Petra, and that this was called "Syria" in the minds of the Arabs, because Petra was a city in the Roman province of Syria. It would be similar to saying one prayed towards Ontario in one sentence and then towards Toronto in another. In this case either Bukhārī or perhaps a later unnamed editor inserted Jerusalem into the first text, but failed to change the reference to Sham (Damascus) in the other texts. So all we know for certain from Bukhārī is that they faced north from Medina.

2. Bacca

Becca is synonymous with the first Holy City of Islam. During the rebuilding of the Ka'ba (Ibn Ishaq 122-124) the people went out and dug up building blocks from the rubble. Several of these stones had inscriptions in Syriac script on them, the language of the Nabataeans of Petra. They found a Jew who could translate it for them, and it read: *I am Allah, the Lord of Bakka, I created it on the day that I created heaven and earth and formed the sun and moon and I surrounded it with seven pious angels. It will stand while its two mountains stand, a blessing to its people with milk and water," I was told that they found in the maqām a writing, "Mecca is God's holy house, its sustenance comes to it from three directions; let its people not be the first to profane it."* (from Ibn Ishaq 122-124)

The word "bacca" is an ancient Semitic word that means to weep or lament. If a location was assigned the title "Bacca" it would mean the place of bacca. There are several Baka valleys in the Middle East today, one in Lebanon and one in Jordan. This term is also used of the Holy City of Islam in several places (Ibn Ishaq 73 and Sura 3:96). Some people have confused this with the term "baraka" which means blessing and have applied it to Jerusalem. "Becca" however was never used of Jerusalem, nor of anywhere near it. The name Bekka does appear in the Bible (Psalm 84) in reference to a "valley of weeping" and is also associated with pilgrimage. Gibson

takes a full chapter in *Qur'anic Geography* to demonstrate that Petra was the object of Arab pilgrimage for hundreds of years before Islam. It is universally recognized among Nabataean scholars that Petra was the main centre of pilgrimage in Arabia. It is interesting to note that any Jews living in Arabia would have passed through this valley on their way to Jerusalem. So it is not surprising to find Becca, pilgrimage and Zion all in the reference.

The Petra Valley could also bear the title of Becca since a number of tragic events took place at Petra, including Hagar weeping over Ishmael, and also major earthquakes in 363 AD, 551 AD, (19 years before Muhammad was born) and 713 AD. There is archeological evidence that these earthquakes caused a great deal of damage. The greatest damage was probably inflicted in 713 AD when not only was Petra affected, but the entire Mediterranean seacoast. Even the mosque in Jericho was destroyed, so much so that it was never rebuilt. (Nur & Burgess, 2008) It may have been that in 713 AD, Petra was finally abandoned since no records of Petra exist after this date. Thus Petra was a place of weeping. There is more about this topic on notes on the [Petra Map](#).

3. Pilgrimage was to Jerusalem. This was true of Jews and Christians, but it was never true of the Arabs. The Arabs of Arabia were a nomadic merchant people. One of the problems they faced was having a stationary place to bury their dead. As they slowly migrated north they developed a burial location in the place we know today as Petra. Dead bodies would be exposed to the elements until only bones were left. These bones were then collected and transported to [family tombs](#) in Petra. Beside the tombs were large dining halls where the tribes would gather twice a year to eat a memorial meal. This twice yearly event is born out by a 2nd century AD Nabataean zodiac which portrays Allat, the female goddess of fertility among other Nabataean deities. The Nabataean zodiac is extraordinary in that contains two opposite and completely separate halves. Some archeologists think that this denotes the existence of two New Year celebrations, one in the spring and the other in the fall, and this might help explain why there were two great festivals at Petra each year.

Doctor Avraham Negev of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey suggests that much of the Arab graffiti found throughout the Negev and southern Jordan was written by people on pilgrimage to Petra. In his detailed study he notes the variety of names that occur in Thamudic, Safaitic, and other early Arabian dialects. (Negev, 1991)

Al Ṭabarī, notes in volume VI (page 12) that during the days before Islam, there were two pilgrimages to the Holy City. The lesser was known as 'umrah. He notes that 'Abd al-Muttalib (Muhammad's grandfather) performed 'umrah on one occasion. This was at a time when the forbidden sanctuary held many pagan idols, among them Hubal (Ṭabarī VI, 1075 page 3) and Isaf and Na'ilah (pg 4). The Qur'ān tells us that these pre-Islamic pagan pilgrimages were known respectively as ḥajj (Qur'ān 2:158, 196) and 'umrah, commonly called the greater and lesser pilgrimage. While Christians and Jews looked towards Jerusalem, for many centuries the Arabian pilgrimage was always to the religious center of Arabia, the forbidden sanctuary, the holy burial city of Petra. It was in this city that the Nabataean dead were buried, and it was in this city that the living gathered to eat a ritual meal with their extended family in the presence of the long departed ancestors. This custom was part of the cultural and ethnic make-up of the Nabataeans, (from whom Muhammad descended) and was the glue that held them, a nomadic merchant people, together as a society.

4. There is an early mosque that faced Jerusalem known as the *Mosque of the Two Qiblas in Medina.*

It is very true the the *Mosque of the Two Qiblas* faced Jerusalem, but if one examines a map, it is obvious that Petra is located between Medina and Jerusalem. Thus this mosque faced BOTH Jerusalem and Petra. If you examine the [Changing of the Qibla Timeline](#) you will discover that there are a dozen early mosques that faced Petra, including the mosques in Medina and Jerusalem! These mosques alone are solid archeological proof that Petra was the focal point of

the first qibla and not Jerusalem. Not a single mosque, outside of the *Mosque of the Two Qiblas* points to Jerusalem, but EVERY mosque built during the first hundred years of Islam pointed to Petra.

5. Jerusalem would explain why Muhammad was preoccupied with fighting the Byzantines.

The Byzantines controlled the area north of Petra, and so Muhammad's armies met first with the Byzantines, before they went to the Holy City to capture it. It is important to note that the Muslim armies captured the Holy City between battles in the Byzantine conflict in what is now southern Jordan. Did Muhammad disengage the Byzantines, march his armies thousands of kilometers to the south to capture Mecca and then march all the way back to fight the Byzantines, or did he just move over to Petra, take it, and then continue his next battle at Mu'ta, only a few kilometers north of Petra?

6. Jerusalem is considered the third holiest city by the Muslims.

Today the most holy Muslim city is Mecca, then Medina, and third is Jerusalem. Muslims for many years have believed that Jerusalem was the focus of the first prayers, based on the records of Bukhārī that we mentioned above. However, Bukhārī wrote 250 years after the founding of Islam, and many generations had passed. From the confusion of names mentioned earlier it is clear that Bukhārī did not know for sure if the first direction of prayer was Jerusalem or Damascus. Today, using archeological tools and modern technology we can pinpoint the first qibla as Petra in southern Jordan.

7. Muhammad's night journey was to Jerusalem.

During his miraculous night journey, Muhammad claimed that he went from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night. The traditional stories claim that Muhammad was in Mecca in Saudi Arabia and that this was a miracle. But what if later editors changed Bekka to Mecca? In the *Zumurrud*, a very early Islamic manuscript, the author argues that Mecca and Jerusalem were close enough that a person could ride between them and back during the course of one evening. How could he argue this unless the Holy City of Islam was Petra at that time?

Arguments for Petra

In his book *[Qur'anic Geography](#)*, Gibson builds his case starting with the early tribes of Arabia, the people of 'Ad, Thamud, Midian etc., demonstrating that all of the Qur'an's geographical references are found in northern Arabia. Finally he turns to Mecca and demonstrates that it was originally located in Petra, and moved to Mecca during the 2nd civil war. He dates this using the two Umayyad mosques constructed on the Amman citadel, one pointing to Petra and one to Mecca, and built only 70 years apart. He supports his archeological findings with many historical and literary supporting arguments. Gibson uses over 400 pages to painstakingly build his case. Some of the evidence he provides is found in graphical format in the timelines and Petra Map located through the links at the top and bottom of this page. The full argument is only found in Gibson's book which can be ordered from [amazon.com](#), [stpt.ca](#) and other online book sellers.

A Timeline of the Becca/Petra Valley

