Mecca And Its Cube: Part 2

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A brief look at the historiography surrounding the Meccan cube—as it purportedly existed in pre-Islamic times—is quite revealing. According to some Arabian lore, a leader named Asad Abu Karb constructed a shrine known as the "Kaaba" in the EARLY 5th century; though details remain sketchy. This account likely referred to the Yemeni Kaaba; not to the cubic shrine that would later be erected in (what came to be) Mecca. And recall that that cubic shrine in Rakmu / Petra (the Nabatean Kaaba) dates back even earlier.

The history of the region goes back much further than traditional Islamic lore accounts for; so it is important to view the pertinent timeframe in a broader context. I explore the history of the Levant in my essay, "The Land Of Purple". To keep things in perspective, it's worth noting that worship in the region goes back to the Neolithic Age…long before even the Sumerians emerged in the late Chalcolithic Age. Jericho was founded around 10,000 B.C. The monolith at Jibal al-Khashabiyeh (located in what is now southeast Jordan) is at least 8 millennia old. (In the northern Levant, the port-city of Ugarit emerged at the end of the 7th millennium B.C. Ebla, Nagar, Mari, and Kish emerged at the end of the 4th millennium B.C.) The precursors to the Nabataeans were the Lihyanites, who's history dates back to the 7th century B.C.

To begin, let's consider the fabled Hashim ibn Abd Manuf, who was purported to have been MoM's great grandfather in Islamic lore. According to some Islamic records, it was he who founded Mecca in the late 5th century. But then again, there are legends of the founding of a settlement at the location-in-question by a Qusay[y] ibn Kilab, who was a member of the Banu Kinana. That was said to have occurred at some point in the 5th century.

So what of the Meccan cube? In the Koran, the most auspicious place is not referred to as "kaaba" [cube], but simply as a "house" or "place of prayer"—that is: "bayt" or "masjid" (2:127, 3:96, 8:35, and 22:25-33). The house is alternately described as "ancient" or "sacred". In only ONE Koranic passage do we encounter the term "kaaba". In Surah 5, the lexeme is used twice. It is referenced in verse 95 as a place to make an offering ("hadya"). Two verses later, it is one of two terms used to name a place—along with "sacred house" ("bayt al-haram"). How is THAT described? Again, the place where offerings are made. {25} That's it.

And what of Mecca? The name is used ONLY ONCE in the entire Koran (48:24). The passage is simply referring to a place where god "withheld their hands from you and your hands from them." (The term "Bakkah" is used once—in 3:96—as a name of the place where god erected the "first house".) In the earliest days of the Mohammedan movement, we hear only of the "umm al-qura", meaning "mother of settlements". This would be a peculiar appellation for "Makkah" when it would have made more sense to simply refer to it as, well, "Makkah".

Clearly, in its earliest days, Mecca's prominence would have been solely ascribable to its new status as the Islamic temenos; not to any other historical geo-political significance. Even if it had existed prior to the early 8th century, it would have been just a collection of tents and mud huts—an isolated hamlet in a barren desert (rather than a major trading hub); which may have served as a center for local Bedouin legends / superstitions. The sacred place—whatever it was, wherever it might have been—was originally dubbed the "masjid [al-haram]" (meaning an auspicious place of supplication; a venue for prayer).

The keepers of the "Kaaba" before MoM's fabled ministry were said to have been the Banu Hashim. The actual name of that tribe's eponymous patriarch (Hashim) was Amir al-Ula. As it turns out, he was a Hanifiyya: a Syriac-speaking people who honored the Abrahamic tradition (yet considered themselves neither Jewish nor Christian). As his name indicates, he was an "amir" (chief) of Al-Ula…which was the (later) Arabic moniker for Dedan. Dedan was a Nabataean trading hub 730 kilometers north of Mecca; and was considered the sister city of the Nabataean capital: Petra.

Hashim was purportedly the son of Abd Manaf ibn Zayd [alt. Qusai] ibn Kilab ibn Murrah ibn Ka'b ibn Lu'ayy ibn Ghalib ibn Fihr ibn Malik ibn An-Nadr ibn Kinana. So what of the ancestor eleven generations back? Kinana was said to have been the progenitor of Hijazi Arabs. He is tied to Ishmael via one of the latter's fabled sons—either Nebayot[h] or Kedar. How? Well, Kinana's father was purportedly Khuzayma ibn Mudrika ibn Ilyas ibn Mudar ibn Nizar ibn Ma'ad ibn Adnan; meaning that he was an Adnanite.

But wait. In Mohammedan genealogy, the idea is that Kinana was descended from the original Kedarites. The problem is that the Kedarites were an Aramaic-speaking people who lived in the land that became Nabataea. (Their capital was Duma[tha]; based on the Assyrian moniker, "Adumatu" from the Iron Age.) This explains why, in his "Antiquities Of The Jews", the Roman historian, Josephus identified the descendants of Ishmael (the Arabs) as the Nabataeans—who, he mentioned, "occupied the lands extending from the Euphrates to the Red Sea." It was the sons of Ishmael, Josephus noted, "who conferred their name on the Arab nation and its tribes." We know about the early Kedarites from the record of their female rulers from the 8th century B.C. (Queens Zabibe, Samsi, Yatie, Te'elhunu, Tabua, and Adia were mentioned in the Annals of Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III as vassals of his empire.)

Tellingly, the records of Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III from the 8th century B.C. identify the rebels as "Nabatu" / "Nabayat" (Nabataens) and Kedarites. Meanwhile, Ezekiel associates Arabia the princes of Kedar (27:21).

So who ACTUALLY dwelled on the western part of the Arabian peninsula? According to Abrahamic lore, that would have been the Qahtanites. But they were ADVERSARIES of the Adnanites. Revisionists try to address this genealogical snafu by linking Adnan to an offshoot of the (Yemeni) Himyarites dubbed the "the Banu Jurhum" in Mohammedan lore (referred to in Greek as the "Gorrhamites"). The whole thing falls apart upon scrutiny.

Visibility is far from clear when attempting to peer through the swirling haze of disparate historiographies. Some of the ancestors of the Nabataeans may have been the Baz[u] and [k]Haz[u] tribes of the Wadi Sirhan (at the eastern frontier of Moab), who were probably related to the early Lihyanites of Dedan and Hegra (corresponding to the Biblical Edomites and/or Midianites). An offshoot of the proto-Nabataeans was likely the Banu Tayy (farther to the east), whose name accounted for the Syriac moniker used to refer to all Ishmaelites.

Curiously, the mercantile people of "Nabatu" (the Nabataeans) are not explicitly accounted for in the Mohammedan version of Abrahamic taxonomy. This is further testament to the fact that those Arabs who became Mohammedans (i.e. the Ishmaelites / Saracens) saw themselves as part of the Nabataean peoples.

It was their language / script that linked Aramaic—via the Arabs' (Nabataean) Syriac vernacular—to what would become proto-Arabic—as attested by the intermediary Kufic script (as I explore in my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text").

That the Nabataeans do not appear in tales of pre-Islamic times (the so-called period of ignorance) is very

telling. It only makes sense of the early Mohammedans were THEMSELVES (descendants of) Nabataeans. That their self-identification changed stands to reason. That they were not at all inclined to ACCOUNT FOR the Nabateans makes perfect sense; as they clearly didn't find the need to account for…themselves.

As usual, the omission—nay, obfuscation—ends up being the most incriminating thing about a historiography. Only if the Mohammedans WERE the Nabataeans would this make any sense. (!)

It makes sense that the early Mohammedans abandoned the place that had been inextricably associated with paganism for so many centuries…in favor of Kufa, where the new language would be developed. They were, after all, asserting a proud, NOVEL Ishmaelite identity, in contra-distinction to the Jewish and Christian legacy, which had been tied to Jerusalem. It's no wonder the Umayyads opted to move their base of operations to Damascus, and then to place a NEW temenos at a novel location: in the Hijaz between the port of Jeddah and Ta'if. This transition occurred at some point between Ibn al-Malik and the advent of the Abbasids. (All the while, Jerusalem would retain a prominent place in Mohammedan lore, as it was the jumping-off point for the fabled Night Journey; and was thenceforth referred to as "Al-Quds" / "Al-Maqdis" / "Al-Muqaddas".)

Let's consider the first three caliphs after MoM's death: Abu Bakr, Ummar, and Uthman (from 632 to 656). These leaders may well be (at least partly) apocryphal, as they are said to have ruled from Yethrib-cum-Medina. But in 656, the capital is moved OUT of the Hijaz…to KUFA. Why would the Mohammedan leadership suddenly move the base of operations FROM the city of the prophet to…Kufa? This would have made no sense. A more likely explanation is that Kufa was THE FIRST Mohammedan capital—that is: after Rakmu (Petra) was abandoned. Then, just five years later (after Ali's death), the Umayyads moved the capital farther north: to Damascus. (The first Abbasid caliph, As-Saffah of Hawara promptly moved the capital BACK to Kufa. Then, he temporarily re-located it to Anbar while the NEW capital, Bag-dad was being built.) It might be noted that Kufa was where the great philosopher, al-Kindi was from (that is: the man who brought Indian numerals to the new Arabic nomenclature). It was ALSO where Numan ibn Thabit ibn Zuta ibn Marzuban was from (a.k.a. "Abu Hanifa", the man who founded the most popular school of Islamic jurisprudence to the present day).

By the last of the four fabled "Rashidun" caliphs (Ali), the capital of Dar al-Islam was KUFA. {4} Kufa was selected not for its strategic location, but because of its close proximity to the old Lakhmid capital of Al-Hira[h]; which had been a thriving city in the middle of Mesopotamia. Hira was a Syriac-speaking municipality with which the (former) Nabataeans would have been very familiar; and—to top it off—was known for a presence of the Abrahamic faith (ref. Abda of Hira). (Damascus was out of the question, as it was governed by the pesky Umayyads.) Also established around that time (by the Umayyad governor, Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf) was the garrison city of ***Wasit***—situated exactly between Basra and Kufa, across the Tigris from the ancient Syriac city of ***Kashkar***. (Both Al-Hira[h] and Kashkar were soon abandoned, in favor of their Mohammedan counterparts.)

Sure enough, Kufa is where the new liturgical "Arabic" script would be developed; and it is where Abu Hanifa (founder of the predominant school of jurisprudence) would be born and raised. Its masjid was built in the late 660's, meaning that even the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya deemed it a very significant place for Dar al-Islam. This is striking, as the Great Mosque of Damascus was not built until c. 715. As it happened, that was the same year that Umayyad caliph Al-Walid commissioned the mosques in Medina and Mecca. (There is no hard evidence of earlier structures at those locations.)

How is it that the Umayyads rushed to build a masjid in Kufa FIRST? Probably because that was the ORIGINAL home-base for the Mohammedan movement—that is, after Petra was abandoned. (To

reiterate, this mosque pre-dates the Dome Of The Rock by a quarter century.)

As it turns out, the Kufa mosque (commissioned by Mu'awiya) was erected on a pre-existing foundation—likely a pre-Islamic place of worship located on the outskirts of the Lakhmid capital: Al-Hira[h]. The people who built it would have spoken Syriac.

So what of (official Islamic) accounts of Mecca during the time of the Tabi-un and the Tabi al-Tabi-un (the two generations after MoM's ministry)? According to the early 10th-century mu-haddith, "Abu Am[i]r" Uthman ibn Sa'id ad-Dani of Cordoba, the fabled Uthmanic Koran (see my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book") was sent to four places: Damascus (Syria), Kufa, Basra, and "Medina"; NOT to Mecca. {35}

What, exactly, was meant by "Medina" here is inconclusive. While Yathrib was eventually re-christened "Medinat (an-Nabi)" [town (of the prophet)], the term is actually from the Aramaic / Syriac "Medin[a]ta", simply meaning "province" (which was commonly used for, say, Judea). Ad-Dani may well have had in mind the Hijazi city that came to be known as Medinat an-Nabi, as it would have been established as a holy place by his time. Be that as it may, he was simply recounting what had been documented in Mohammedan lore from centuries past—perhaps not realizing that "Medina" might have been used in an alternate way prior to the Abbasid era.

The (actual) provenance of the Umayyad caliphs is probably lost to history. Of course, the traditional Islamic narrative puts the birthplace for most of them in either Mecca or Medina; as the proffered lore posits the Banu Umayya as Hijazis (being fellow Quraysh, related to the progeny of apocryphal figures like Makhzum ibn Yaqaza and Hashim ibn Abd Manaf). Yet we know that ALL the Umayyad caliphs probably hailed from SYRIA, not from the Hijaz. (Some were said to have been born in Medina; but this is highly dubious.)

Some of the earliest Muslims were said to have hailed from Mecca or Medina, but such claims are dubious. Take, for example, "imam" Malik ibn Anas ibn Malik, known for having penned the earliest compilation of Hadith (the "Muwatta") at the end of the 8th century. One of his teachers was Hisham ibn Urwah…who's father (Urwah) was the son of the famed Mohammedan military commander, Zubayr of Awwam. Imam Malik's other teacher was Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, who's father was an acolyte of the (anti-Umayyad) leader, Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr…who, it turns out, was ALSO from Awwam. Awwam was located near the ancient Yemeni city, Ma'rib; and was the site of the Sabaean temple to the deity, Almakah. Go figure.

The point is worth reiterating: If the hagiography of the Umayyads is questionable, that of the Rashidun caliphs is even more so. Thus the provenance of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali is—most likely—riddled with farce. Indeed, from its earliest days, bespoke Islamic legacies were being manufactured—and gilded—as the need arose. For example, we hear various (somewhat dubious) accounts about Sophronius of Damascus (who by then was in Jerusalem) and about Theophilus of Edessa: both with respect to Umar ibn al-Khattab (the Rashidun caliph following Abu Bakr's death). Hence tales of the so-called "Pact of Umar" (with Levantine Christians) as well as dandy relations between the Saracen conquerers and Levantine Jews. Many of the mis-impressions about this period stem from "History Of The Caliphs", written in the late 15th century by the Mamluk mu-jaddid, Jalal ad-Din al-Suyuti of Cairo.)

Granted, the extent of comity between the Mohammedans and any Jewish / Christian people they subjugated during this early period is difficult to ascertain. There was invariably some degree of Abrahamic fellowship between all such peoples; yet relations surely varied from case to case. The early Mohammedans—who, to reiterate, saw themselves simply as "Mu-min-een" (believers)—fashioned there movement NOT as an entirely separate religion; but in solidarity with fellow "Ahl al-Kitab" [People of the

Book]. Indeed, they originally used the term “ummah” to refer to everyone conducting themselves within the fold of the Abrahamic Faith—including Jews, (non-Trinitarian) Christians, and Sabians (see Footnote 30 of “Mecca And Its Cube” part 1). After all, “Islam” was not seen as NEW; it was simply an attempt to bring things BACK to the Faith as it had originally existed. So, for the timing being, there was a shared Mosaic identity based on an explicit monotheism—with the Abrahamic deity (the god of the Mikra) as the godhead. This sentiment was intimated in verse 62 of Surah 2, verses 113-114 of Surah 3, and verse 69 of Surah 5.

The fungibility of early Mohammedan identity is also attested by numismatic evidence during the second half of the 7th century: Umayyad coinage up to—and including—caliph Abd al-Malik exhibited both menorahs and crosses. (!) Indeed, the Syriac patriarch, Isho’yahb III of Adiabene articulated such Abrahamic solidarity in the 650’s; though with qualifications. {8}

When it comes to figuring out what really happened, there exists quite limited archeological evidence. There is a Syriac inscription on the Church of St. Sergius at Ehnesh from the early 930’s, which announced the recent conquest of the Arabs. There is, of course, also the Dome Of The Rock—the original inscription of which was commissioned by Abd al-Malik in the last decade of the 7th century. But these a sparse dots in need of connecting.

For textual clues, we might consider accounts in other extra-Islamic sources like the “Didaskalia Iakobou” (“Doctrina Iacobi” in Latin) [Doctrine of Jacob] (from the late 630’s); the “History” by Armenian bishop, Sebeos (from the late 7th century); as well as the Judaic apocalyptic text, “The Secrets of S[h]imon bar Yo[c]hai” (from the late 8th century / early 9th century). Also worth referencing are the travelogues of the Bavarian rabbi, Petachiah ben Yakov of Regensburg and the Andalusian rabbi, Benjamin of Tudela (from the late 12th century). Factoring for the biases of any given source is no easy task. We know, for instance, to take Coptic Apocalypses like those of Elijah and of Shenouda of Athribis (a.k.a. “Shenute the Great”) with an ample dose of salt; as they are primarily anti-Islamic invectives.

Recall that the city-in-question is mentioned only twice in Islam’s holy book: once as “Makkah” and once as “Bakkah”. In 48:24, we are told that god withheld the hands of aggressors against the believers in “the valley of Makkah”. The reference to “Bakkah” in 3:96 indicates that THAT may have been the original version of the moniker (if, that is, we are to even assume that it is referring to the same place as the term used in verse 24 of Surah 48). Lo and behold: Psalm 84 mentions a pilgrimage through a “valley of Bakkah”…which was clearly referring to a place in the Levant.

It’s worth reviewing the local geography. Edom and the “Arabah” (later understood as the realm of the Kedarites) were separated by what was dubbed “[har] Se’ir” [hills of Se’ir] (as alluded to in Deuteronomy 33:2). This is the region in which the “Shasu” and “Horites” dwelled. {32} It also corresponds to the dominion of the “Amalekites”. According to traditional accounts, the Amalekites lived in the area that stretched from the eastern Sinai Peninsula—across the Negev—to “[har] Se’ir” (in other words: the area that would later be “Arabia Petraea” / “Nabataea”). Here’s the kicker: In his “History”, the famed Islamic historian, Al-Tabari reported that the Amalekites operated out of a place called “Makkah”. (!) So the question arises: Was Al-Tabari mistakenly placing the Amalekites in the central Hijaz…or was he saying that “Makkah” was a toponym that was originally associated with “Arabia Petraea” (that is: Nabataea)? The answer seems to be THE LATTER; as he goes on to say that the Amalekite king, who ruled from Makkah, battled the armies of Joshua.

Joshua’s fabled conquests were entirely in the Levant—in large part: in what would eventually become “Arabia Petraea” / “Nabataea”. He never ventured south into Midian (the northern Hijaz). Upon traversing Edom (into the “Arabah”), the legendary Ephraimite leader headed north, through Moab, up into Ammon.

He then went westward, across the Jordan River, into central Canaan.

Further evidence presents itself: “Arabia Petraea” (as well as “P[h]aran”) was associated with “Makkah” in two Armenian sources. The first, from the 7th century, was the “Geography” by Ananias of Shirak. Then, in the 870’s, the Vaspurakan chronicler, Tovma of the Artsrunik wrote the “History Of The House Of The Artsrunik”, reiterating this onomastic parity. If this were, indeed, the case, it would explain why the Mohammedans opted for this moniker when moving the temenos from Petra to the central Hijaz…even though it was only used ONCE, in passing, in the entire Koran (as the name of a valley in 48:24).

This brings us back to the Nabataean capital city. Its alternate Semitic name, “Sela” (meaning “[place of] the rock”) was rendered “Petra” in Greek. It came to be known in Syriac as “Ra[c]hm[u]” (a variation on the Semitic lexeme, “Ra[c]him”, meaning “mercy”), which was alternately rendered in the distinct Nabataean dialect: “Rakmu”. The city in question was also referred to as the “mother of settlements” and the “blessed city” or “holy site”…BOTH of which were used in Islamic scripture to refer to the temenos (Koran 6:92 and 2:149 respectively). Note that I explore the various temene of the world’s major religions in my essay, “Pilgrimage” (where I show that it was not uncommon for creeds to alter their temenos when the occasion warranted).

In surveying the historical record, we find that the first reference to a “Mecca” doesn’t even come from an Islamic source. It occurs in the Latin “Continuatio Byzantia-Arabica” (sequel to the Byzantine-Arab Chronicle) composed c. 744 (during the reign of Umayyad caliph, Al-Walid II) by Christian writers in Andalusia. When using the term, though, they were referring to a place that was somewhere in western Mesopotamia (effectively, what used to be Nabataea) rather than to a place in the central Hijaz. The occurrence of the term at this point is extremely telling, as it shows that it was, indeed, in use prior to the ascension of the Abbasids…YET in a way that antedates its serving as the name for a temenos in the central Hijaz.

Where might these Andalusian scribes have gotten the term? As it turns out, the chronicle’s section on Muslim activity seems to have been based on the “Chronicon Mundi”, a Coptic work composed by John of Nikiou[s] at the very end of the 7th century. As would be expected, that was soon translated into the other two other major languages of the region: Syriac and Greek. (It would eventually be translated into Latin and Ge’ez as well. Only much later was it translated into Arabic. The “Continuatio Byzantia-Arabica” seems to have made use of the Syriac rendering.) This means that “Mekkah” may have been a known (Syriac) onomastic in the Middle East as far back as the reign of Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan; and—as the present analysis concludes—it had an altogether different meaning at that point in time. Clearly, it did NOT pertain to the place in the Hijaz now known as Mecca.

If we understand the era of the vaunted “Salaf” (the first three generations after MoM’s ministry) as culminating during the caliphate of Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan (that is: in the last decade of the 7th century), what else might we note? According to Al-Tabari’s “History” (vol. 21), the followers of the dissenting caliph, Abdullah ibn Zubayr of Awwam—who purportedly ruled from (read: founded) Mecca—declared that they “turned to the same qibla as he did”. This was presumably done as a sign of fealty to HIM contra the Umayyads. (He was in power c. 683 – 692.) This comment strongly insinuates that there were qibla alternatives at the time, and that Mecca was a novel choice. As the Mohammedan movement was still in its embryonic stage, we might surmise that this is where later leaders got the idea to designate THAT location, in the center of the Hijaz, as the (still gestating) creed’s temenos.

From all this, we can conclude that Mecca’s founding can be placed at some point between the last decade of the 7th century and the first few decades of the 8th century. By the time the Abbasids took power c. 750, Mecca would have been a relatively new city. Notably, the second Abbasid caliph (Al-Mansur)

devoted his 21-year reign to two major projects:

- Establishing the future capital of Dar al-Islam, “Madinat as-Salam” [City of Peace] in Mesopotamia. That was later christened with a Persian onomastic: “Bag-dad” (meaning “God-given”). The original inhabitants of that site were a Syriac-speaking people, possibly even Nabataens.
- Developing the still-nascent Mecca—a process that was recounted by Al-Azraqi in his “Kitab Akhbar Makkah” [Book Of Reports On Mecca]. The Arab historiographer proffered a smorgasbord of conjecture about the (apocryphal) history of Mecca and its cubic shrine prior to the reign of Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik (who’s rule had ended over half a century earlier). (Much of the lore surrounding Mecca likely used this account as a touchstone.) Al-Azraqi then outlined the extensive development undertaken by Al-Mansur in the late 750’s and early 760’s, to which he was personally witness. Any conception of Mecca was thereafter based on the city as it existed following such civic development.

It is worth noting that the first three Abbasid caliphs were NOT Hijazis; they hailed from the old Nabataean trading hub, Hawara [Syriac for “White”]. (The next two were from Rey, in Persia!) Meanwhile, Kufa remained an auspicious place in the Muslim world through the 9th century, as attested by, say, the emergence of the controversial esotericist, [Abu Musa] Jabir ibn Hayyan. Many who were born in Kufa moved to the capital, Baghdad, starting in the late 8th century—as with Hisham ibn al-Kalbi (author of the “Kitab Al-Asnam”) and, later, the Ali’d historian, Abu Muhammad Ahmad ibn Atham al-Kindi (author of the “Kitab al-Futuh”). Ibn Hisham hailed from Basra; and instead moved to Egypt.

It makes sense that when ***Makkah*** (alt. “Mecca”) was eventually established, it was positioned at roughly the halfway point between (what became) the port of ***Jeddah*** and the inland settlement of ***Ta’if*** (see Appendix 1). When was that? Sometime between the reign of Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (around the turn of the 8th century) and the time the Abbasids came to power in 750.

Of course, the Mohammedan lore about Mecca did not begin until in the 9th century—primarily with the “sira[h]” literature initiated by Abu Muhammad Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham (who claimed to have based what he knew on an earlier, now lost, bio by Ibn Ishaq). He was from Basra (which had been founded across the Tigris from the ancient Syriac city of ***Kashkar***).

Meanwhile, Hisham ibn Muhammad ibn al-Sa’ib ibn Bashir (a.k.a. “Ibn Al-Kalbi”) penned the “Kitab al-Asnam” [Book of Idols], which also contributed to tales surrounding the Islamic temenos. {5} He was from KUFA…as were BOTH Ibn Mas’ud (the most esteemed reciter of the Koran amongst the Salaf) AND Abu Hanifa (the man who founded what is, to this day, the most prominent school of jurisprudence).

The Hadith literature began in the LATE 9th century. {6} The first man known for being familiar with ALL the major Hadith collections was from Basra (Ma’mar ibn Rashid). And his teacher? From Basra (Qatada ibn Di’amah al-Sadusi; a.k.a. “Abu Khattab”). And HIS teacher? Yep, also from Basra (Abu Sa’id ibn Abi al-Hasan Yasar). Who else was one of the first pioneers of Hadith material? Shu’ba ibn al-Hajjaj [ibn al-Ward Abu Bustam al-Ataki]…who hailed from, you guessed it, BASRA.

Funny how it is only once we go far back to the mists of the 7th century that we suddenly encounter hagiographies of key figures who (purportedly) hailed from Medina or Mecca. In other words, when records became a bit clearer, suddenly NOBODY of import happened to be from those two places.

One of the more bold claims is that the 8th-century figure, Malik ibn Anas hailed from Medina. Did he? Probably not. (It’s worth noting that both he and his teacher, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, served the Umayyad caliphate in Syria.) Yet lore surrounding him quickly cropped up once an entire school of jurisprudence,

based on his teachings, was inaugurated. (It is ALSO worth nothing that his famed student, Abu Abd-ullah Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i hailed from Gaza City; and ended up teaching in Fustat / Cairo, where he inaugurated his own school of jurisprudence.)

Bear in mind that testimonies about MoM's life were all from ***at least*** one and a half centuries after their legendary subject's death. Moreover, the authors of ALL FIVE of the most vaunted ("sahih") Hadith collections hailed from a faraway land: the north-eastern-most reaches of Persia. (As his name states, Bukhari was from Bukhara in what is now Uzbekistan; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, Ibn Khuzaymah, and Al-Hakim al-Nishaburi were from Nishapur in Khorasan; and Ibn Hibban was from Bost in what is now Afghanistan.)

In sum: Prevailing impressions come from material composed centuries after the fact. And ALL of the key players plied their trade in the Egypt, the Levant, and/or Mesopotamia. This indicates that tales of Mecca in the hagiography of the Salaf—and, thus, likely the Sahaba and MoM himself—are almost certainly farcical. The most plausible explanation for the traditional Islamic narrative: Mohammedan historiographers indulged in flights of fancy to create a useful origin myth. Indeed, any account of Mecca (or Medina, for that matter) during the Rashidun and Umayyad eras are likely figments of their imaginations. And any account of Mecca during the Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ayyubid eras is—shall we say—highly dubious. (Again, much of the mis-information that abounds can be traced back to a book from the late 15th century: Al-Suyuti's "History Of The Caliphs".)

The earliest PERSONAL accounts of the city are not found until the early (Bahri) Mamluk period—that is: the late 13th and into the 14th century. And as we'll see, it wasn't until the later (Burji / Circassian) Mamluk period that the first quasi-credible accounts can be found—that is: from the late 14th and into the 15th century.

The 14th century corresponded with the first century of (post-Seljuk) Ottoman rule, during which somewhat dependable accounts start to emerge of the Hijaz. During that time, the Ottomans were more focused on frontiers to the northwest, not southward into Arabia. Consequently, they seemed to have only been obliquely aware of the Islamic temenos. Prevailing impressions would have likely derived from hearsay from pilgrims. The Mamluks had sovereignty over the Levant and Hijaz until the early 16th century, whereupon the Ottomans finally expanded southward and seized control. At THAT point, detailed accounts would have started to become more dependable.

What, exactly, was going on with Mecca between its beginnings in the early 8th century and the advent of the Mamluks half a millennium later is unclear; as that period is shrouded in the mists of history. All we have available to us now is overwrought Mohammedan folklore touted by a panoply of dubious sources—from Ibn Hisham to Al-Tabari (both of whom harkened back to a fabled account by Ibn Ishaq). Suffice to say: All of that material should be taken with a vat of salt. Alas. Muslim apologists are incorrigible on this point. {7}

One of the earliest attestations of a "Makkah" was by the 14th-century Berber traveler, Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Battutah in his highly-embellished travelogue, "Gift To Those Who Contemplate The Wonders Of Cities And The Marvels Of Traveling" (a work that came to be known as the "Rihla[t]"). His (purported) visits to the city were seven centuries after the Mohammedan seizure of the city (see Appendix 2). The travelogue was redacted c. 1356—***almost three decades later***—by the Andalusian writer, Ibn Juzayy "al-Kalbi" of Granada. (The Black Death would have hit Mecca in the intervening time—around 1349.) In the travelogue, it is noted that the cubic shrine was ***not the original***. The previous "Kaaba" had been razed (so the story goes), and a newer one had been built in its place. {2}

It is not until the modern era, then, that we become aware of any substantive details of the small Hijazi city—which would be fashioned as the axis mundi for Dar al-Islam. Even during the Ottoman era, the information about Mecca is rather sparse; and narratives about the city were slowly formed—in an ad hoc manner—over the course of centuries. This was done by various people who cobbled together choice tidbits from myriad (often dubious) sources.

Recall that the Hadith accounts were not composed until the late 9th century. Those were based entirely on a smorgasbord of apocrypha about the Seal of the Prophets, who (so the story went) hailed from Mecca. Such folklore had emerged over the previous couple centuries; and was finally formalized by, of all people, PERSIAN writers (with the first Hadith collections). {5}

No hub named "Mecca" was involved in the trading routes of the region during Late Antiquity. The "Periplus Of The Erythraean Sea" (from the late 1st century) shows all key mercantile hubs in Abyssinia (northeast Africa, dubbed "Barbaria") and along the Hijaz (western Arabia). {9} It mentions the Sabaeans and Himyarites, and recognizes key places; but—tellingly—it does NOT include a trading hub in Thamud (the Hijaz) located about 80 kilometers inland from present-day ***Jeddah***…which was to the south of the port at ***Charmutha*** (located near present-day Yanbu)…which was itself just south of the port at ***Leuke Kome*** (located west of present-day Tabuk). For more on the port cities of the Red Sea, see Appendix 1.

So what of Mecca's location? The place-in-question would have been barren desert (no fertile ground, no water, no lush vegetation); so there would have been no reason for anyone to venture there. (If anything, during the relevant period, the area would have been occupied by the ancient Quda'a tribe.) My hypothesis is that the port of Jeddah, on the coast of the Hijaz directly opposite the bustling Abyssinian port of ***Trinkitat***, preceded the establishment of Mecca; and that Mecca was established thereafter. (Other Abyssinian ports in the vicinity included ***Berenike Epi-Deires*** and ***Aydhab***.)

Jeddah started being used as a port in the 640's or 650's, it seems—pursuant to the Saracen take-over of North Africa. Trinkitat (which had previously been known alternately as "Ptolemais Theron" and "Epitheros") would have thereafter been a shipping hub from grain and Zanj—that is: the export of foodstuffs and African slaves to the Arabian peninsula.

Over the course of the next century, it would be decided that a new holy city—a distinctly Arabian temenos—be created; and that it should be called "Makkah" (alt. "Mecca"). The location was about 80 kilometers inland from the port-in-question. The location was exactly halfway to the inland town of ***Wajj*** (later referred to as "Ta'if"), which was home to the Syriac-speaking Banu Thaqif of the Qays Aylan (a break-away group from the Mudar, who had been affiliated with the Kingdom of Kinda).

Especially notable was the Nabataean King Abgar V of Edessa [Osroene], who reigned in the 1st century A.D. He was known as "King of the Arabs"—as attested by the Roman historian, Tacitus. The Abgarid Dynasty ruled until the mid-3rd century. Meanwhile, from the 1st century B.C. through the 2nd century A.D., an Arab Dynasty known as the Emesenes ruled much of Syria. They worshipped a godhead that was known as "El Gabal" (later rendered "Ilah al-Gabal"; Romanized to "Elagabalus"), meaning "god of the mountain". A sacred black stone was located in the main shrine to him. (Emesa is now the city of Homs; Halab is now the city of Aleppo; Urhay ["Edessa"] is now the city of Urfa.) The influence of these kingdoms may have stretched as far east as ***Duma[tha]*** (from the Assyiran "Adummatu"). Their populations would have predominantly spoken Syriac. {26}

It makes sense, then, that the entire area—from Al-Sham (in the north) to Midian (in the south)—was referred to as "Arabia Petraea" (alt. "Palaestina Salutaris") by the Romans. To wit: Nabataea was

synonymous with “Arabia”. In speaking of “Arabs” during Late Antiquity, expositors had people from this region in mind. Hence “Arabia” did not mean the Arabian Peninsula PER SE, as it does today. It referred to the portion of the Levant to the east of Canaan, and stretching down into northwestern Arabia—as far south as ***Dedan*** (now known as “Al-Ula”) and ***Hegra*** (Arabized to “Al-Hijr”; now known as “Mada’in Salih”) and as far north as ***Tadmor*** (Palmyra) and ***Hatra*** (known by its Syriac moniker, “Beit Elaha”; House of God). All such cities were Syriac speaking; and all of it was ethnically ARAB. So while “Arabia Petraea” included the upper reaches of the Hijaz (in the south), it also included Osroene (in the north). There are illustrations of this geographical purview. In the Old Testament literature, the region was often referred to as “Kedem” [the East], which was equated with Arabia (Gen. 10:30, 25:6, and 29:1). And in his letters, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) said that he went on a three-year sojourn to the EAST…into “Arabia”. He was traveling from Damascus.

Paul’s account of going east from Damascus into “Arabia” (that is, into the eastern Levant) can be found in Galatians 1:15-17. The term “Arabia” was effectively synonymous with Nabataea (that is: “Arabia Petraea”), which stretched as far north as Damascus. (Also note references in 1 Maccabees 5:25/39 and 9:35; as well as 2 Maccabees 5:8). In Second Corinthians 11:32–33, Paul says that “King Aretas” tried to arrest him in Damascus. This would have referred to the Arab king, Aretas IV, who ruled Nabataea from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D.

What was going on in this region culturally? The Ghassanid capital (located where the Golan Heights meets the Hauran plain) was Jab-i-Yah, which meant “chosen by god” in ancient Semitic. This shows that the Ghassanids had already adopted the Abrahamic idiom—replete with onomastics; and was adopted by the Umayyads as a major military hub.

The authors of the Hebrew Bible referred to the language of the Arabs (spec. the Nabateans) as “leyshon Kedar” [“tongue of the Kedarites”]. The Kedarites were referred to as the “sons of Ishmael” (alt. “Ishmaelites”); as Kedar was, indeed, one of the sons of Ishmael. This nether-region betwixt Egypt and Judea was vaguely referred to as “Kedar” in Exodus; and so is the place where the Israelites “wandered in the wilderness” for 40 years. (It was alternately referred to as the “Arabah” and “P[h]aran”.)

In his 1st-century “Historia Naturalis”, Pliny refers to the Kedarites in conjunction with the Nabataeans when discussing the people of northern Arabia (a.k.a. “Arabia Petraea”). Thus Kedar is roughly what became Nabataea. The Nabataeans (read: “Kedarites”) spoke Syriac—as did other Arab regimes in the region like the Ghassanids, Tanukhids, and Salihids. Their original capital was to the east at the archaic Kedarite city of Duma[tha]; but was later relocated to Rakmu / Rekem[o] (better known by its Greek name, “Petra”, meaning “place of the rock”). As it turns out, “Sela” was the Biblical name for…PETRA. In chapter 42 of the Book of Isaiah (verse 11), Jewish scribes mention the “inhabitants of Sela” [inhabitants of the rock], which likely referred to those who lived in and around Petra. Lo and behold: Muslims eventually dubbed a stone outcropping in Medina “Sela”.

For Romans / Byzantines, Nabataea was referred to as “Palestina Salutaris / Tertia” (as a way to distinguish it from the more northern “Palaestina Prima” and “Palaestina Secunda”). It was alternately known as “Provincia Arabia” or “Arabia Petraea”. As far as the Romans were concerned, these were “Arabs” (alt. “Saracens” or “Ishmaelites”): those who lived in the western Levant—from Syria to Midian, from the banks of the Jordan River to the deserts of Babylonia.

So what of others we would now refer to as “Arab”? Much farther to the south, at the bottom of the Arabian Peninsula, were the Sabaeans / Himyarites. Such peoples had mercantile relations with the (Levantine) “Arabs” with whom the Greco-Roman world was most familiar; yet they were invariably referred to as, well, “Sabaeans” or “Himyarites” (and possibly “Katabanians” and “Kahtanites” per a later

Ishmaelite taxonomy). THAT region was referred to as “Arabia Felix” by the Greco-Romans. {27} Such peoples are vastly different from the “Kedarites” who are referred to in the Assyrian records (spec. those of Ashur-banipal from the 7th century B.C.) {29} So when we hear of pre-Islamic “Arabs”, we are effectively hearing of the Nabataeans / Tanukhids / Ghassanids, and some peoples farther EAST (like the Salihids and Lakhmids).

Nabataean king Aretas IV (who reigned from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D.) was responsible for the development of ***Rakmu*** (a.k.a. “Petra”; likely corresponding to the Biblical “Sela”) skirting the Arabah Valley; as well as the cities along the trade route between Petra and the port-cities of ***Gaza*** and ***Ashkelon***. {22} Note that this was the king mentioned by Saul of Tarsus in is letter to the Galatians when recounting going to east of Damascus into “Arabia” for three years. (The region was simply referred to as “Arabia” in the Pauline letters, in keeping with the Roman nomenclature, “Arabia Petraea”.) {10}

So it is important to recognize the fundamental difference between “Arabs” of the Levant (with Midian at its southern-most point) and the ancient peoples at the southern-most point on the Arabian Peninsula (who, while “Arabian”, were not the “Arabs” referred to in ancient documents). This distinction can be made in terms of theology (deities worshipped) as well as by the scripts used (Ancient North Arabian vs. Ancient South Arabian). Doing so entails contrasting gods like Hu-Ba[a]l, Dushara, and Kaabu (in the north) with gods like Haukim, Anbay, Yatha, Basamum, Wadd[um], Athtar, Amm, Almakah, Nasr, Shams, Ta’lab, Dhat-Himyam, Dhat-Badan, and even the Judeo-Christian “Rahman[an]” (in the south). It also entails contrasting Safaitic / Thamudic inscriptions (in the north) with Sabaic / Sayhadic inscriptions (in the south). Such disparities clearly indicate two separate peoples. {36} The former existed within the purview of the Lihyanites then Nabataeans; the latter existed within the purview of the Sabaeans and Katabanians, followed by the Aksumites and Himyarites. While the maritime trade between the two cultures—up and down the Red Sea—would have exposed each to the other’s memetic repertoire, the degree to which one of these had a cultural influence on the other is difficult to ascertain. {37} What of Man[aw]at, Al-Uzza, and Allat[u] / Lat[an]? Contrary to Islamic lore, this triad of goddesses were NABATAEAN, not Qurayshi. (They are clearly attested in Syriac inscriptions in Nabatu, not on anything in Himyar or Aksum.)

It is important not to get tripped up by genealogical shenanigans, which yield the misleading taxonomies which were concocted post hoc to make sense of the official historiography. Such shenanigans go on and on. Some Islamic revisionists go so far as to locate the Amalekites in Yemen. (!) This is done by linking the Yemenis to legendary figures like Kataban and Kahtan—both of whom came to be associated with the Sabaean realm. The ruse is also accomplished by placing the Lihyanite oasis settlement, Tayma (sometimes rendered “Tema[n]”) in Yemen; which mistakes the Edomite clan (named after Esau’s grandson, through El-i-phaz) for a Yemeni people—a flub that accounts for the misnomer, “Teman-im” for Yemeni Jews. The notion that Joshua took a random bee-line down to the very bottom of the Arabian Peninsula before proceeding up toward Gilead is, of course, preposterous.

So what were the KEY PLACES throughout the Nabataean domain? It is to a survey of such places that we will now turn.

A survey of the auspicious locations of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages may serve to elucidate the geopolitics of the time. At some points, the Nabateans controlled as far north as ***Tadmor / Palmyra***, with the following Syriac Christian cities between the capital city, ***Rakmu*** / ***Petra*** and destinations to the north and east (that is: in Syria and Aram):

- ***Darmsuk*** (Dimaska; Anglicized to “Damascus”)
- ***Halab[a]*** (Greek: Khalibo[n] / Beroea; Arabized to “Aleppo”)
- ***Madaba***

- ***Ker-Heresh*** (alt. “Harreketh” / “Kharkha”; Arabized to “Al-Karak”)
- ***Gabitha*** (Jabiyah)
- ***Bos[t]ra*** (replete with a suburb that is now known as “Umm al-Jimal”)
- ***Gerasa*** (Jerash)
- ***Ar[a]bela*** (Irbid; renown for its grapes, and thus its wine)
- ***Nimreh*** (Namara)
- ***Hatra*** (alt. Syriac “Beit Elaha” [House of God]; Arabized to “Al-Hadr”)
- ***Dibon*** (Dhiban)
- ***Emesa*** (Homs)

Bear in mind that not all of Syria was Arab (Nabataean / Ghassanid). For the majority of Late Antiquity, most of the northwestern Levant was Greco-Roman. Note, for example, Byzantine cities like Leontopolis, Emath[ous], Scythopolis, and Julia Neapolis. Pursuant to the Ishmaelite conquests, these were re-named “Rakka[h]”, “Hama”, “Beit She’an”, and Nablus respectively. (The first meant “marsh” in Syriac; the second was from the Syriac “Hamat[h]a”; and the third was later rendered “Baysan” to elide the fact that it was named the “House of” a pagan god.)

Other notable places—like ***Serug[h]*** and ***Urhay*** (Edessa)—were not within the ambit Nabataean culture; as they were settled by non-Arab Syriac Christians within the Byzantine orbit. As far north as ***Harran***, there were the (Arab) Abgarids, who used the Nabataean (Syriac) alphabet.

Meanwhile, all north Palestinian port-cities—Latakia (a.k.a. “Laodikea ad Mare”), G-B-El (“well of god”; alt. “Gebal”; rendered “Byblos” in Greek), Tyros (Tyre), Berytus, Tartus, Sidon, and Akka (Acre)—were Greco-Roman ALL ALONG (from the advent of the Seleucids in the late 4th century B.C. until the Mohammedan take-over in the 630’s). {22} In fact, the majority of Levantine cities that became Arab were originally Greco-Roman—as with Antioch, Apamea, Gadara, and Philadelphia (which, oddly, was re-named “Amman” based on its Ammonite origins). Note: The Dead Sea was known to the Romans as “Palus Asphaltites” [Lake of Asphalt], as it was a major source of Bitumen, which was traded along Nabataean routes.

Key Nabatean trading hubs between Petra, the port-cities of ***Gaza*** and ***Ashkelon***, and the northern Hijaz included the port-city of ***Aila*** (likely corresponding to the Biblical “Aila[t]h” / “Elath” or “Ezion-Geber”; now known as “Aqaba”) as well as inland cities like:

- ***Zoar[a]*** (Greco-Roman “Segor”, possibly corresponding to the Biblical “Zeboim”, “Bela” / “Balac”, or “Admah”)
- ***Bozra[h]*** (Arabized to “Busayra” / “Busheira”; not to be confused with the more northern city of “Bos[t]ra”)
- ***Hawara*** (Auara; rendered in Arabic as “Humayma”)
- ***[k]Halus*** (Greek: Elousa / Chellous; rendered in Arabic as “Al-Khalasa”) {21}
- ***Mampsis*** (Mamshit)
- ***Sobota*** (Oboda[t]; Hebraic “Shivta” / “Avdat”)
- ***Nessana*** (Nitzana)
- ***Bethomolachon*** (Hebraic “Rehovot[h]” / “Bertheiba”; rendered in Arabic as “Ruheiba”)
- ***Udhruh*** (Greek: Adrou)

These sites—largely located at the eastern end of the Sinai peninsula, in the Negev desert, and the lower Dead Sea plain—were major hubs in the ancient trade routes for myrrh and frankincense. {4} Many fell into ruin pursuant to the Mohammedan conquests of the late 7th century. By then, the Iron-Age hub, ***Kadesh*** was defunct. (This is not to be confused with the Assyrian city of “Kadesh”, located on the Orontes

River in the land of Amurru. It corresponds to the place the Israelites were said to have dwelled after the Exodus, before proceeding into "Arabah". It is now the archeological site at Tel Qudeirat.) By the Greco-Roman period, the archaic cities of ***Arad*** and ***Hes[h]bon*** had also fallen into ruin.

This region roughly corresponded with the Egyptian "Biau" on the Sinai Peninsula, plus the Biblical lands of Edom and Moab. Interestingly, Ptolemy mentioned a place he referred to as "Mako-Araba", which was located somewhere in Arabia Petraea. (!)

It is worth noting the geographical placement of the Biblical "P[h]aran": the "wilderness" through which the Israelites wandered following the Exodus from Egypt (Numbers 10 and 12). Granted, the (literal) exodus never actually occurred; but insofar as people were aware of the STORY and the relevant PLACES, they clearly had in mind the Negev desert—that is: the region separating the Sinai Peninsula from the Judean countryside. This was otherwise known as Edom / Idumaea; and was primarily associated with Beer-Sheba in Abrahamic lore.

Again, the eastern frontier of this region (i.e. the "Arabah") was alternately referred to as "Palaestina Salutaris" and "Arabia Petraea"; which roughly corresponded to what had been "Kedar" (that is: the Biblical Edom, with Moab—then Ammon—to the north, and Median to the south). This was effectively ***Nabataea***.

We are told in the Torah that, after wandering across the Sinai peninsula (referred to as the wilderness of Zin), the Israelites eventually came to the settlement of Kadesh, then made their way into a region dubbed "Arabah". "Arabah" corresponded to Edom—with Midian to the south and Moab to the north. (Ammon was even farther north; and [Paddan] Aram was to the north of that.) This is what would eventually be known as "Nabataea". It makes sense, then, that Nabataea was alternately referred to as "Arabah" by those familiar with the Torah. Their tongue would have been known alternately as Nabatean Syriac and "Arab[i]ya" [Syriac for "tongue of the Arabs"]. {28}

Here's the thing: The Ishmaelites associated "P[h]aran" with their homeland, in accordance with the Biblical accounts of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21). This onomastic convention indicates that they—ipso facto—saw themselves as hailing from Nabataea. (!) Sure enough, it is in "P[h]aran" that they place their original temenos, per the earliest Mohammedan lore. (Indeed, in the early 8th century, the historiographer, Wahb ibn Mu-Nabi of Dhamar stated that "Makkah" was in "P[h]aran".) One thing of which we can be sure: "P[h]aran" was NOT referencing Thamud (i.e. the central Hijaz; which would have been south of Midian). If the original temenos was, indeed, in "P[h]aran", then we know that it was, indeed, Nabatean; not from someplace deep into the deserts of the Hijaz.

What does all this mean? The southern frontier of Median was the southern-most part of what would have been considered the Kedarite (Arab) realm. Those at the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula were seen as an entirely different people (Sabaeans)…who traded with the Kedarites (via maritime routes), but were not THEMSELVES Kedarites. The conflation of these disparate peoples was likely the result of a retroactive taxonomy touted by the (Mohammedan) Ishmaelites—who posited the "Kahtanites" / "Himyarites" (ostensibly: Sabaean Arabs) in contradistinction to "Adnanites" (effectively: Nabataean Arabs). Archeological evidence does not support this categorization scheme (viz. different kinds of Arabs)–which is based on spurious Abrahamic genealogies.

Yemeni peoples (denizens of what the Greco-Romans referred to as "Arabia Felix") were ethnically related to the ABYSSINIANS far more than to the Kedarites—as a result of the Sabaean and Aksumite Kingdoms. The barren nether-region between Median (the northern Hijaz) and Saba / Himyar (Yemen) was, for all intents and purposes, terra incognita…until the 8th century.

The etiological mythology used to account for this ethnic bifurcation is based on a fictive genealogy. "Ishmaelites" did NOT include Yemenis. The fabled Adnan was said to have had two sons. The progeny of Ma'ad were the Kedarites (read: Nabataeans); the progeny of Akk were the Yemenis (read: Sabaeans). Ma'ad was purported to be an ancestor of the Quraysh. {31} Meanwhile, Akk was believed to be the progenitor of the Kahtanites / Himyarites (notably: the Azd and Khuza'ah). This is all farce; but the idea is to characterize Nabataeans and Sabaeans as simply two different KINDS of Arab; as both are categorized as Adnanites). The implication is to associate both with the western part of the Arabian peninsula; which has the effect of blurring the provenance of the Quraysh…who are used to account for the pre-Islamic keepers of the Hijazi temonos (i.e. the Meccan cube). The etymology of that (contrived) tribal name is quite telling: It derives from the Arabic for "merging together" (that is: bringing into common association): "ta-qarrush".

As it turns out, the original moniker for the Banu Quraysh was the Banu an-Nadr; which was a clan of…the Kinana (referred to as the "Kinai-Dokolpites" by the Byzantines). According to some sources, the early Quraysh (read: the Kinana) undertook two annual pilgrimages. One was to a site in Yemen in the winter; the other was to a site in the Levant in the summer. These are obliquely referenced in Surah 106. (Also ref. 2:198, which alludes to pre-Islamic pilgrimages.) Lo and behold: At the time, there was—indeed—a Nabataean temenos and a Yemeni temenos.

To reiterate, the Lihyanites ("Edomites" and "Midianites" in Biblical terms) were the forefathers of the Nabataeans. {32} They TRADED WITH the Sabaeans—a fact recognized in the Book of Isaiah (60:6). This was via maritime routes (that is: shipping on the Red Sea). Travel from the southern Levant to Yemen through the deserts would have made no sense.

The Nabataeans were clearly related to the Lihyanites, as the latter's structures at Hegra and Dedan were carved into the faces of rocks in what would become the signature Nabataean style (thus closely resembling the structures found in Petra). Remnants of their capital, located near present-day Tabuk, can be found at the Shu'ayb Caves (named after the Biblical figure, Jethro: the grandson of the Biblical figure, Midian).

During Late Antiquity, the Nabataeans pioneered merchant activity no only in the southern Levant, but in Midian (the northern Hijaz, sometimes referred to in Islamic lore as "Thamud"). Note that there was a major Nabataean emporium at Hegra. Meanwhile, in Ta'if, a major (Syriac) literary competition was held during pre-Islamic times—known as the "souk Ukaz[ha]". It is no surprise that two famous female (Syriac) poets hailed from that town: Qutayla bint an-Nadr and Hind bint al-Khuss al-Iyadiyya. Recall that Ta'if was the venue at which the Thaqif worshipped the goddess, Al-Lat. (The goddess, Al-Uzza was worshipped at a cubic shrine in the nearby wadi: Nakhla / Hurad.)

It's worth noting that Midian is referenced BY NAME in the Koran (as "Madyan[a]"). 7:85 and 28:22-23 recount Moses' years in the desert, where he meets his Midianite wife, Zipporah; while 11:84 and 29:36 associate the Midianites with Zipporah's father: Shu'ayb [Jethro]. 9:70 and 11:95 associate the Midianites with the people of A[a]d and/or Thamud. {33} So what's going on here? The Mohammedans sought to distinguish themselves GENEALOGICALLY from their Nabataean (pagan) forefathers. Note, though, that the Ishmaelites were seen by non-Mohammedans as including the Midianites. Indeed, the earliest Aramaic and Greek renderings of scripture sometimes use these ethnonyms interchangeably. In chapter 37, the Book of Genesis tells us that, after being thrown in the well by his brothers, Joseph was retrieved by a caravan. In one version, it is referred to as a caravan of Ishmaelites; in another version, it was of Midianites.

In embracing their Ishmaelite pedigree, the Mohammedans were adamant about distancing themselves

from anyone who was seen as antagonistic to monotheism in Abrahamic lore. There was nothing novel about this; the contempt for the "Midianites" was a trope that went back to the Book of Judges (ref. the first nine verses of chapter 6). {34}

So what of other key locations in the region? The provenance of the city, ***Ma'an*** (located slightly to the east of Petra) is unclear. According to Islamic lore, it was founded by the Minaeans during Classical Antiquity. Some sources claim that the Minaeans hailed from Karnawu (referred to in Arabic as "Ma'in") at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula (present-day Yemen). More likely, Ma'an was established at some point in the pre-Islamic era as a stop along a caravan route between Petra and ***Duma[tha]*** (present-day "Al-Jawf"). {16} This is confirmed by the Zenon Papyri, which mentions that, during Classical Antiquity, the Minaeans (and the Gerrheans) competed with the Nabataeans for the frankincense and myrrh trade of the region. {18} In any case, Ma'an was home to the (Christian) Banu Judham. Being, as it was, a major mercantile hub 30 kilometers southeast Petra, it would have served as a way-station for caravan routes between the Nabataean capital and the Hijaz. {17}

These sites would have also been involved with the transportation of copper and turquoise from the ancient mines at ***Timna*** (not to be confused with the Qataban city in Yemen), ***Phaino*** (Khirbat Faynan), and ***Wadi al-Ghuwayba*** (Khirbat an-Nahas). {15} By the end of Late Antiquity, the residents of ALL these cities would have spoken Syriac; and many seem to have had a significant Jewish and/or Christian presence. The region stretched from the Sinai peninsula, across the Negev (Edom), into the "Arabah" (Moab and Kedar), and down into the northern Hijaz (Midian). (Copper was also mined and traded by the Nabataeans as far east as the Wadi Arabah.)

To the south was ***Tabawa*** (Tabuk), near which was a settlement called "Al-Bada'a"—best known for the ruins in the so-called "Shuaib" [Jethro] caves. ***Hegra*** (Arabized to "Al-Hijr"; now known as "Mada'in Salih") and ***Dedan*** (now referred to as "Al-Ula") were also significant cities at the time; yet went into decline soon after the rise of the nearby commercial center of "Al-Mabiyat" during the early Islamic era. Both Dedan and Hegra (which were first established by the Lihyanites) were located between ***Duma[tha]*** and Hijazi locations to farther south…perhaps as far south as Yathrib-cum-Medina. There was a small oasis settlement along that route known as ***Tiamat*** (possibly named after the Mesopotamian creator goddess; rendered "Tayma" in Arabic), which probably served as a stop for caravans. {19} Also note the remains at ***Darb Zubaydah*** (now known as "Al-Rabatha"), which was later used on the caravan route between Yathrib-cum-Medina and Kufa.

The (predominantly Jewish) settlement at ***Khaybar*** was in the region as well. Farther inland, the days of ***Duma[tha]*** (alt. "Dumat al-Jandal") were numbered; as the Mohammedans would soon raze the ancient Nabataean city and convert its church to the Umar mosque—rechristening it "Al-Jawf".

The other key Hijazi settlement was, of course, ***Yathrib*** (alt. "Taybah"; later christened "Madinat an-Nabi" during the Umayyad period), home of Jewish tribes like the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Qurayza, and Banu Nadir. Non-Jewish Arabs in the vicinity would have included the Banu an-Nar and Banu Huraq clans of the Banu Ghifar, which was—like the Quraysh—a branch of the Banu Kinana[h] (itself a member of the Mudar confederation, so grouped for all being descendants of the patriarch, Nizar ibn Ma'ad ibn Adnan).

The vast majority of activity in the Hijaz would have been limited to the coastal plain along the Red Sea coast, known as the "Tihama[h]"; which lies to the west of the Sarawat mountain range. As mentioned, farther inland was ***Wajj*** (a.k.a. "Ta'if"), home of the Syriac-speaking Banu Thaqif of the Qays Aylan. Ta'if was located in a lush garden valley; so—unlike a hypothetical pre-Islamic Mecca—its existence is explicable. (It was on the eastern / inland side of the Sarawat mountains.) To review: There seems to have been a small oasis settlement just to the west of Ta'if known as ***Nakhla*** [meaning "Palms"; alternately

referred to as “Hurad”]—where, as mentioned earlier, the Mudar worshipped Al-Uzza at ANOTHER cubic shrine. In addition, there were (purportedly) other nearby venues–notably: Mijannah and Dhul Majaz (alt. “Dhu al-Majaz”) in the Hunayn valley.

That accounts for auspicious places in Midian—that is: in the northern half of the Hijaz, on the southern frontier of Nabataea. If one were to transport anything from Yemen / Himyar, it would have been shuttled NOT up through the desert on camels, but over to Jeddah, so that it could be shipped. The only Nabataean caravans through the desert would have been those used to get to and from places at their southern frontier (i.e. northern Hijazi locations like ***Tabawa***, ***Hegra***, ***Dedan***, ***Khaybar***, ***Tiamat***, and possibly even ***Yathrib***). This would have accounted for the routes of the so-called “Incense Road”. Such routes would not have stretched any farther south than that; as travel through the desert would have made no sense in lieu of maritime transportation.

Key cities in Yemen / Himyar included:

- ***Nashan*** [alt. Nestum] (Khirbat al-Sawda)
- ***Nashak*** (Khirbat al-Bayda)
- ***Kaminahu*** (Kamna)
- ***Haram[um]*** (Khirbat Hamdan)
- ***Karnawu*** (Ma’in)
- ***Najran***
- ***Zafar*** (alt. “Saphar”; Haql Yahdib)
- ***Ma’rib***
- ***Azal*** (Sana’a)
- ***Timna***
- ***Raydan***
- ***Dhamar***

…as well as the port-cities of ***Muza*** (Mokha) and ***Eudaemon Arabia*** (Aden). Most of those cities were established by the Sabaeans or Himyarites in Late Antiquity. Recall that the (Christian) Arab tribe known as the “Khatham” used to perform a pilgrimage to the Kaaba at Najran (also notable are nearby sites like Al-Ukhdud and Bir-Hima). Meanwhile, the Sabaeans established Barran and Awwam as holy sites near ***Ma’rib***. (Ma’rib was also known for its great dam, on which there are Old South Arabian inscriptions.) Dhamar was next to an auspicious Sabaean site known as the “Nakhla al-Hamra’a” [Red Palm]. The sacred Ghumdan palace in Sana’a dated back to the 3rd century. And the Al-Qalis church at Azal attests to the pre-Islamic presence of Christianity in Sana’a. Slightly farther to the east, in Hadramaut were the cities of ***Shabwa*** (Sabbatha) and ***Shibam***.

There are even the ruins of minor settlements in Arabia’s barren interior, the Najd—as with the ancient Kindite cities of ***Qaryat Dhu Kahl*** (alt. “Dhat al-Jannan”; now known as “Qaryat al-Faw”) and ***Jebel Umm Sanman*** (now known as “Jubbah”); not to mention the ancient Lakhmid city of ***Hir[t]a*** (“Al-Hirah”) farther east, next to which Kufa would eventually be established. {3} Another Lakhmid city, ***Kashkar***, was located on the Tigris, next to where Basra would be founded. Those seem to have been located in lush venues during Late Antiquity…unlike the site where Mecca was later founded, which was NEVER lush. We might venture even farther east, to the northeastern part of the Arabian peninsula (Dilmun), were there was a Lakhmid location known as ***“[h]Agarum”*** (alt. “Akarum”; “Pit-Ardashir” in Persian; later dubbed “Al-Ahsa” / “Al-Hasa” in Arabic); with ***Gerrha***, ***Ad-D[o]ur*** [alt. “Ed-Dur”], ***Saruk al-Hadid***, ***Muwe-ilah***, and ***Shimal*** slightly to the south (many of which traded with the Nabataeans, and even used Nabatean coinage).

That's **more than A HUNDRED** documented cities in the region; yet no allusion to a Hijazi settlement called "Makkah" before the 8th century; and no archeological evidence for such a place until even later than that. (!) There are, of course, myriad other archeological sites of lesser significance scattered across the region; but—to reiterate—Arabian archeology is comparable to Sudanese figure skating: It's not a burgeoning industry. There are probably plenty more sites awaiting discovery. But as things currently stand, there were no traces of Mecca. {11}

The question cannot be avoided: How is it that we have evidence of ALL these places in the pre-Islamic period; yet NOTHING for the one place for which proponents of the traditional Islamic narrative would have every incentive to proffer evidence? And why Mecca's utter lack of prominence in the (ACTUAL) historical record until the Ottoman period?

Tellingly, the "Kitab Akhbar Makkah" [Book Of Accounts Of Mecca] provides THE FIRST description of the place in the central Hijaz that came to be the Islamic temenos. {30} It was purportedly written by someone from the Banu Ghassan in the 860's. Recall that, during the advent of the Mohammedan movement, the Ghassanids were Syriac Christian Arabs. The original author's name was—we are told—Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Ahmad al-Ghassani (who came to be known as "Al-Azraqi", meaning "The Blue"). We rarely hear about this document, as its exposition (spec. its terminology; as with "masha'ir") does not accord with what one might expect…that is, were one to presume the veracity of the standard Islamic narrative.

A brief survey of the Hijaz in its post-Abbasid eras is worth mentioning. Note that the Abbasid period endured from c. 750 until 1258 (when Hulagu Khan sacked Baghdad); yet they had dominion over the Hijaz for only the first two of those five centuries. Then…

Starting in the late 940's, the ***Ikhshidids*** (a Turkic dynasty operating out of Fustat, Egypt) took control of Canaan down to the northern Hijaz (i.e. Midian; corresponding to the southern-most reaches of old Nabataea); as well as Egypt and Nubia. We hear of nothing about Mecca. Following them (starting c. 969), the ***Fatimids*** (a Berber dynasty that originated in Tunisia, and operated out of Fustat-cum-Cairo) controlled that area well into the 11th century. Again, we hear nothing about Mecca.

Let's be clear: There is nothing concrete on Mecca in the historical record up to this time. Thamudic / Safaitic inscriptions exist in the northern Hijaz–from Dedanic to Hismaic to Taymanitic–going back to the Lihyanites.

At the turn of the millennium, the (Isma'ili) Fatimids were a major presence in the region-in-question. They were followed by the (Isma'ili) ***Sulayhid*** dynasty in Yemen, founded by a local Hamdani leader named Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sulayhi c. 1047. According to a handful of scholars (ref. Farhad Daftari's "Isma'ilis in Medieval Muslim Societies"), the Sulayhids became custodians of the Meccan cube; yet this assertion is based on scant evidence. In any case, the Sulayhids were vassals of the Fatimids. Their dynasty endured through the reign of a female ruler named Arwa, who died c. 1138. During her time on the throne, she moved the local capital from Sana'a to a new city, which was christened "Jibla".

Enough about Yemen for the time being (as it would be ruled thereafter by various other Hamdani dynasties—from the Zurayids to the Sulaymanids to the Mahdids). The ***Zengids*** (Turkic vassals of the Seljuks from 1127 to 1250) then took control of the relevant area (the Levant and northern Hijaz). As with the Ikhshidids, their dominion stretched only as far south as Midian. Why not farther to the south? Barring humble oasis settlements at Khaybar, Tiamat / Tayma, and possibly Yathrib, there was no major municipality located in the Hijaz south of Hegra and Dedan (barring small ports along the Red Sea)…that

is, until one got as far south as Yemen / Himyar; as explicated in Appendix 1. Trade between the northern Hijaz and Yemeni destinations would have been MARITIME. It's worth asking: If Mecca had been so pivotal, why would the Zengids—notably, the famous leader, Nur ad-Din—have been utterly unconcerned with bringing it into their fold?

Well, then, what about the ***Ayyubids***? In 1173, the Kurdish sultan, Saladin sent his older brother, Turan-Shah to conquer Yemen / Himyar. (Not Mecca.) The fear was that Egypt might fall to the aforementioned Zengid ruler, Nur ad-Din. Therefore, control over the southern end of Arabia was seen as a key geopolitical strategy. (At the time, Yemen was still controlled by the Sulayhids, who were ruled by Queen Arwa.) The idea, then, was to dominate the Red Sea trade routes.

How did Turan-Shah get to southern Arabia? Not by riding camels through the west-Arabian desert. He took ships down through the Red Sea; as they were constantly traveling along that ancient maritime route. Tellingly, records of Turan-Shah's military campaign did not include Mecca. In 1174, he seized the Yemeni city of ***Zabid***. He then seized the port-city of ***Eudaemon Arabia*** (Aden). He promptly chose ***Ta'iz*** (not Mecca) to be the Ayyubid's Arabian capital. (Ta'iz was a new city that had recently been founded by the Sulayhids.) The next year, Turan-Shah drove out the Hamdanid rulers from ***Sana'a***. The prize acquisitions were thus Zabid, Aden, Ta'iz, and Sana'a. Nothing is mentioned about Mecca. (Why would there be? At the time, the only relevant Hijazi locations were a few sea-ports along the Tihamah; as outlined in Appendix 1.) Turan-Shah's touted conquests tell us much of what we need to know about what mattered most at the time.

And after that? In 1180, the Ayyubid emir of Yemen, Uthman al-Zandjili was charged with further conquest. Up into the Hijaz? Nope. His incursions were eastward into Hadramaut.

As it turns out, the first incursions into the (inland) central Hijaz—where Mecca was located—would be by the (Bahri) ***Mamluks*** (a Turkic dynasty operating out of Cairo, Egypt) in the early 14th century. That was well after the famous conquests of the Cumen-Kipchak sultan, Bay-pars [Turkic for "Great Panther"] during the 1260's and 1270's (which were primarily in the Levant); as Mecca is nowhere mentioned in the commemoration of the sultan's major accomplishments: the "Sirat al-Zahir Baybars".

In fact, we don't encounter any major references to Mecca in Islamic documentation until its appearance in the aforementioned "Rihla" (travelogue) of Ibn Battuta from later in the 14th century…which is ITSELF rather suspect. To review, the tract was penned not by Ibn Battuta, but by an Andalusian amanuensis named Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Juzayy (almost three decades later). Ibn Juzayy was operating out of Granada. But, as it turns out, Ibn Juzayy cribbed his descriptions of Mecca from an account by the 13th-century writer, Ibn Jubayr (from over a century earlier), who also claimed to have done the Hajj from Granada. To make matters worse, Ibn Jubayr was HIMSELF guilty of cribbing much of his material. (His accounts of Palestine are facsimiles of material composed by Mohammed al-Abdari al-Hihi.) Meanwhile, the entire account of China seems to have been plagiarized from the "Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar" by Ibn Fadlallah al-Umari of Damascus. Other sources on which these amanuenses were riffing include Sulayman al-Tajir, Al-Juwayni, Rashid ad-Din Hamadani, and even the Alexander Romance.

In sum, neither Ibn Jubayr nor Ibn Juzayy were dependable sources; ergo neither was the "Rihla" of Ibn Battuta (see Appendix 2). It comes as no surprise, then, that this travelogue has passages that are remarkably similar to the travelogue of Marco Polo—going so far as to share specific commentary with the Venetian explorer (who, it might be noted, was Roman Catholic and sympathetic to the pagan Mongols; making such parity rather odd).

There are only three other tales of pilgrimages to Mecca prior to the reign of Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II in

the 15th century (who, by the way, never once mentioned Mecca during his long reign). {12}

- The account of Persian writer, Nasir Khusrow Qubadiyani of Bactria (Khorasan), who's journey purportedly took place in the late 1040's. The tale of his visit comes from his "Safar-nama" [Book of Travels], which is more a work of literature than anything else. According to him, his endeavor was inspired by a dream sequence. The work provides detailed descriptions of Jerusalem and Cairo.
- The account of the famed polymath, Ibn Khaldun visiting Mecca c. 1388. As it turns out, this is dubious as well. Indeed, Ibn Khaldun—who lived in Mamluk Egypt—seems to have been subject to the same kinds of apocrypha as Ibn Battuta. Only a little digging reveals that the record of his visit is rather flimsy.
- The account of the fabled Malian "Mansa", Musa c. 1324…which, funny enough, ALSO comes from the writings of Ibn Fadlallah al-Umari…and, unsurprisingly, winds up in the writings of Ibn Khaldun. Such incestuous hagiography should be a red flag.

In conclusion: Lots of good scholarship has been done on the ***Abbasid*** presence in the Hijaz (from c. 750 to the late 940's), but—oddly enough—nothing specific is known of their activity in Mecca. Some scholarship has been done on the brief reign of the ***Ikhshidids*** (vassals of the Abbasids), but there's nothing specific about any activity in Mecca. Much scholarship has been done on the ***Fatimids***, but there's nothing specific about any activity in Mecca. Much scholarship has been done on the ***Zengids***, but there's nothing specific about any activity in Mecca. And a little bit of scholarship has been done on the ***Sulayhids***, but there's nothing specific on anything they might have done in Mecca.

Notice a pattern?

Moving forward, extensive scholarship has been done on the ***Ayyubids***. This is largely due to their involvement in the Crusades. Remarkably, we hear nothing specific about anything happening in Mecca. Morover, plenty of scholarship has been done on the ***Mamluks***, yet we hear of virtually nothing about activity in Mecca during the two centuries that they ruled the Hijaz. This lack of documentation is peculiar for a place that is supposed to be the center of the universe.

What can we conclude from this? Anyone claiming with apodictic certainty that Mecca existed—replete with its cubic shrine—in the late 6th century (when MoM was coming of age) is—to be frank—full of shit. And those who insist that the Meccan cube has been there since the Bronze Age are just being silly. {13}

To reiterate: It is not until the Ottoman period (read: the modern era) that we find dependable accounts of Mecca in the historical record. And it's not until the Dutch scholar, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje of Lieden University did his doctoral thesis, "Het Mekkansche Feest" [The Festivities Of Mecca] in 1880 that we have anything approaching meticulous documentation of the city. (Hurgronje was not actually permitted entry until he converted to Wahhabism a few years later.) In 1881, an Egyptian documentarian named Muhammad Sadiq Bey took the first photographs of Mecca. At the time, the population of the city was around 30,000; and its primary industry was the slave trade. (In fact, it had the largest slave market in the world.) During World War I, the Hashemites allied with the British and drove the Ottomans out of the Hijaz. Shortly thereafter, the Saudis drove out the Hashemites. {14}

That brings us to today. To the degree it exists, Wahhabi-sanctioned archeological projects are highly regulated by the House of Saud, who'd much prefer certain things remain forever lost to history (i.e. anything that doesn't comport with the official narrative). There's a reason that the Saudi monarchs have never permitted scientists to carbon date the gazelles painted on the interior of the Meccan cube; as it would be shown that the renown shrine is almost certainly less than 13 centuries old; perhaps FAR less. (Gazelles are the most frequently depicted animals in Arabian petro-glyphs; and played a significant role in

pagan lore in the region going back thousands of years.) And what of the paintings of trees on the interior of the Mecca's cubic shrine (referenced in some of its earliest descriptions)? As it turns out, they were virtually identical to the images found in the mosaic on the cathedral of Al-Qalis in Sana'a. The iconographic—one might even say semiotic—parity between the Meccan cube and the Yemeni church is very telling.

A dating of less than 13 centuries would, indeed, corroborate the present thesis. Even if the Meccan cube wasn't erected until after MoM's fabled seizure of the city, whereupon Mohammedans first enjoyed control (thus placing the shrine's founding at the latest possible date within the ambit of Islamic lore), it would STILL be (almost) 14 centuries old. If he'd truly grown up in proximity to the Meccan cube, it would need to be more than 14 1/2 centuries old. And if Abraham had built it, it would need to be about 37 centuries old.

In the first decade of the 21st century, during the considerable excavations conducted all around the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, if there was ANYTHING to find, it surely would have been found. The Saudis found nothing. Not ALMOST nothing. LITERALLY nothing. (Rest assured, if they would have found so much as a shard of pottery with an Arabic letter on it, they would have been shouting from the rooftops.) This non-event speaks volumes.

And what of Petra? From the remains of the city, we can see that the Nabataeans excelled at building irrigation systems—including dams, ducts, cisterns, and reservoirs. Their technological advances were most on display from the highly-sophisticated carving required for the massive structures built into stone edifices—replete with tunnels and chambers within. Most famous are the "Khazneh" (treasury), the "Deir" (monastery), and the giant amphitheater; but there is also the Great Temple, the Kasr al-Bint, the Temple of the Winged Lions, the "Jabal an-Nmayr", and—of course—the mysterious cubic shrines (including the Nabataean Kaaba). {23} Even now, archaeologists estimate that only about 15% of the city has been uncovered. The other 85% remains underground; so has yet to be investigated. {20}

It is worth delving into this matter with humility and caution. Sacred cow-tipping is a perilous enterprise. The problem is that when you lift up the rug to see what's underneath, you end up pulling the it out from beneath some people's feet. (They'd much prefer everyone just leave the rug "as is"; and be on their way.) Upsetting consecrated apple-carts is not always the best career move. Further discussion of archeology in the region can be found in the works of Greg Fisher—especially "Rome And The Arabs Before The Rise Of Islam", "Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, And Sassanians In Late Antiquity", and "Rome, Persia, And Arabia".

There are still many unanswered questions about the history of Mecca; and there are several pending queries about the origins of the Mohammedan movement. As we have seen, myriad things in the standard Islamic narrative don't add up; and much of it does not comport with the available historical evidence. It should not be taboo to openly acknowledge this. Needless to say, scholars should not be chastised for trying to find explanations, even if those explanations wind up being unpalatable to those who are adamant about upholding conventional wisdom.

A heterodox monograph such as this warrants critical feedback. But such feedback does not come in the form of a harumph or a jeer; it comes in the form of "Here's what you missed" or "Here's where you're mistaken", followed by hard evidence to back up the counter-claim. (It might also come in the form of: "Here's how your deductive reasoning is flawed", followed by a cogent argument that yields alternate results.) In spite of my diligence, I have no doubt that I may have missed something. Perhaps I even got some facts wrong. As I have no vested interest in any given verdict, I'd love to find out.

In exploring this topic, I have found that there are two kinds of people who will meet the preceding essays with sneering contempt: those who are craven and those who are deluded. The former typically devolve into an "who can really say?" morass of relativism. This is pusillanimity disguised as humility. The latter—who are smitten with a certain brand of dogmatism—tend to feign certitude about things of which they have no actual knowledge. (The former involves a cop-out; the latter involves conceit.) Both sorts of people are being dishonest—not only with others, but with themselves. Consequently, both will be inclined to scoff at the disquisition offered here—a reminder that intellectual dishonesty correlates with intellectual paralysis.

Those with a modicum of courage forge onward. In trying to make sense of the clues currently at our disposal, it is important to be perspicacious. Assumptions should be made judiciously, inferences modulated, and speculation tempered. The key–easier said than done–is to resist the (ever-present) temptation to pretend to know things that we don't really know.

Here's what we can surmise from the available evidence: Going back to Classical Antiquity, the earliest Arabs were Lihyanites, who were referred to as Edomites and Midianites (per Biblical nomenclature); and later as "Kedarites". Their successors were the Nabataeans (who were pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Manichaean); and, starting in the 730's, THEIR successors would be those referred to alternately as "Ishmaelites" or "Saracens" (who, by the end of the 8th century, were primarily Mohammedan).

Conclusion:

It bears worth repeating: In the midst of the extensive digging around the Masjid al-Haram in the first decade of the 21st century, Saudi excavators found ***absolutely nothing*** that indicated a Bedouin presence before the 8th century. Unsurprisingly, when they came up empty-handed, the authorities remained completely silent. Nobody was the least bit perplexed by this (rather deafening) silence. The workers simply proceeded with pouring the concrete foundations for the massive building projects…as if it weren't a monumental embarrassment that no evidence whatsoever was uncovered that might have corroborated the tales about Mecca during MoM's lifetime.

Given what we currently know, we can surmise the following: The earliest Mohammedans were Nabataeans and Arab tribes in the vicinity (e.g. the Banu Tayy). By the early 8th century, the majority of the Nabataeans–still operating primarily out of ***Rakmu*** / ***Petra***–were ruled by the Ghassanid dynasty: Arab Christians who ruled from ***Bos[t]ra*** (and served as vassals of the Byzantine Empire). {24} After considering all the evidence enumerated in part 1 of this essay, we cannot come to any other conclusion than that the genesis of the movement was in Petra; not in Mecca.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 As the story goes, the final Rashidun caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib moved the capital from the holy city of Medina to Kufa in 656 because the latter was more strategically located. This explanation makes little sense. Transitioning the base of operations to Kufa would have cut the distance to Damascus by about 26% (from 1065 km. to 781 km.) and to Jerusalem by only about 5% (from 930 km. to 877 km.) In any case, it was hardly better situated for the westward expansion happening at the time. Persia had already by taken by 644; and the primary focus was hegemony into North Africa (while pushing the frontier a bit farther into Kurdistan). So there would have been little military benefit to this change; and certainly no religious advantage. The alternative explanation is that the base of operations transitioned from Petra—which needed to be abandoned due to its pagan affiliations—to Kufa, which had been established

due to its proximity to the ancient Syriac-speaking city, Al-Hira[h]. Another point worth noting: According to Mohammedan lore, during his time in the employ of Khadijah, MoM oversaw caravans trading wares between his hometown and destinations as far as the northern Levant. It strains credulity that he would go on these trips had the origin been present-day Mecca; and makes far more sense that his origin had been somewhere else in the Levant.}

{2 There are various accounts of the Qarmatians—led by Abu Tahir Sulayman al-Jannabi of Bahrayn—sacking Mecca c. 930. (The Qarmations were a syncretic sect from eastern Arabia that combined Shiism and Zoroastrianism. They endured from the late 890's through 1077.) Much of this lore is apocryphal; as it is largely based on the writings of Abu al-Qasim ibn Ali ibn Hawqal of Nisibis, who composed his "Surat al-Ard" [Face Of The Earth] c. 977. Tall tales include the massacre of a caravan of 20,000 pilgrims returning from Mecca in the early 10th century—a risible claim. Other accounts come from the 11th-century historiographer, Al-Juwayni—another dubious source.}

{3 These Kindite cities (the antecedents of Qaryat al-Faw and Jubbah) may have been populated by those who alternately ended up in Ta'if: the Banu Thaqif of the Qays Aylan (who, it seems, worshipped the goddess, Al-Uzza). Those were a Syriac-speaking people who had broken off from the Mudar (the tribe most affiliated with the Kingdom of Kinda at the time). The cities may have also been populated by some of those who—alternately—ended up in the Hijazi port at Jeddah: the Banu Kalb and Banu Tanukh of the Quda'a (both of whom would have spoken Syriac). Also note the caravan town of ***Ha'il*** in the Nejd, which may have existed going back to Late Antiquity.}

{4 Note that the Nabataeans didn't just trade minerals (iron ore, copper, and turquoise) and incense (frankincense and myrrh). What else did they trade? Sheep and camels. But above all: HORSES. In fact, they bread and sold what came to be dubbed the famed "Arabian horses". Given their elite pedigree, these horses became quite popular across the Roman—then Byzantine—Empire. In other words, Arabian horses were not from the Arabian peninsula; they were, in reality, NABATAEAN horses. For more on what the Nabataeans traded, see the "Periplus Maris Erythraei".}

{5 Hisham ibn Al-Kalbi was originally known by his sobriquet, "Al-Mundhir", which was an old SYRIAC name routinely used by both Lakhmid and Gassanid leaders throughout the 5th and 6th centuries. This is telling. Why would an icon of the Mohammedan movement, who purportedly used ARABIC, come to be known by a moniker that was distinctly Syriac, and associated with CHRISTIANS? This is a bit odd; unless, that is, Syriac was simply the lingua franca at the time.}

{6 The three earliest Hadith collections were done by Persian hagiographers in the late 9th century: Muhammad ibn Isma'il of Bukhara (a.k.a. "Al-Bukhari"), Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj of Nishapur (a.k.a. "Muslim an-Naysaburi"), and Abu Dawood Sulayman ibn al-Ashath ibn Ishaq al-Azdi of Sistan (a.k.a. "Al-Sijistani"). Anything they wrote about Mecca would have been based entirely on hearsay. Indeed, it couldn't possibly have been based on ANYTHING BUT hearsay. The first Hadith collection is attributed to Al-Bukhari; yet the oldest full manuscript of his vaunted compilation that is available is from the early 11th century. (!) THAT was composed in Maghrebi script (an offshoot of the Kufic script), and was reputed to have been a redaction done by the Persian mu-haddith, Abu Dharr of Herat (a.k.a. "Al-Harawi")—a proponent of the Ash'ari school who hailed from Khorasan. That it was done in the Maghrebi script indicates that there must have been stages of transmission from the far-eastern reaches of Persia to north Africa. In other words, the only version of Al-Bukhari's Hadith we have wasn't even done by Al-Bukhari; and is from a place that was tens of thousands of kilometers away. It is worth noting that Abu Dawood's "Sunan" hagiography is especially favored by Deobandis; and was popularized in the 19th century by Rashid Ahmad [ibn Hidayat Ahmad] of Gangoh (a.k.a. "Ayyub al-Ansari")…along with his disciple, Khalil Ahmad of Saharanpur. It is the tremendous amount of intervening time that should give us

pause.}

{7 Consider the notorious lackey for Al-Waleed bin Talal Al-Saud: Georgetown's Jonathan A.C. Brown. His delusive thinking on the topic is on full display in his "The Canonization Of Al-Bukhari And Muslim: The Formation And Function Of The Sunni Hadith Canon". Also note his "Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy In The Medieval And Modern World". Alas, the House of Saud signs Brown's paycheck, so we shouldn't be entirely surprised by his sycophancy; nor taken aback that he is simply toeing the line of Wahhabi fanatics. Presumably, the check clears each month.}

{8 For more on this topic, see Robert G. Hoyland's "Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish, And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam", Michael Philip Penn's "Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians And The Early Muslim World", and Stephen J. Shoemaker's "A Prophet Has Appeared: The Rise Of Islam In Christian And Jewish Eyes".}

{9 Note that the Red Sea was referred to in early Semitic languages as "Yam Suph". In Syriac, it was known as "Yam[m]a Summaka". Its southern-most part was known in Hellenic parlance as "Erythra Thalassa" [Red Sea]; Latinized to "Maris Erythraei". This would later be known to medieval Europe as the Erythraean Sea. The "red" likely stemmed from its association with the ancient Semitic toponym Edom—which literally meant "Red" (referring to the land at its northern periphery). Hence the Hebrew moniker, "Yam ha-Adom" and the Latin rendering, "Mare Rubrum". The Arabic moniker, "Bahr al-Qulzum" came into fashion when the sea was named after the Roman port-city of Clysma (which corresponds to what is now Suez).}

{10 Paul's account of going east from Damascus into "Arabia" (that is, into the eastern Levant) can be found in Galatians 1:15-17. The term "Arabia" was effectively synonymous with Nabataea ("Arabia Petraea"), which stretched as far north as Damascus. (Also ref. 1 Maccabees 5:25/39 and 9:35; as well as 2 Maccabees 5:8). In Second Corinthians 11:32–33, Paul says that "King Aretas" tried to arrest him in Damascus. This would have referred to Aretas IV, who ruled Nabataea from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D.}

{11 The city of ***Sa'ada*** seems to have been established at the end of the 9th century by the Zaydis, who were Shi'ites. There is no evidence for its existence prior to that. Meanwhile, according to Mohammedan lore, ***Zabid*** was the hometown of the Sahaba, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari and Amr ibn Ma'adi Yakrib. However, there is no evidence for its existence before the 9th century—during the rule of the (Sunni) Ziyadid dynasty. As discussed, that would be followed by other Hamdani regimes like the (Sunni) Najahids and (Isma'ili) Sulayhids; then the (Zaydi) Rasulids, who were Mamluk. The city was likely named after the Zubayd clan. ***Jibla*** was founded in the 12th century by Sulayhid Queen Arwa. Remarkably, during this time, Mecca seems not to have played a prominent role in the historical events of Yemen—a peculiar absence considering it is considered the axis mundi by Muslims.}

{12 During the Middle Ages, there was a route established which came to be known as the "Darb Zubayda"—named after the Abbasid princess, Zubaydah bint Jafar ibn al-Mansur. (She was consort of caliph Abu Jafar Harun al-Rashid at the end of the 8th century, and into the early 9th century.) Zubaydah—who's name means "butterball"—became famous for her ornate tastes and hyper-opulent lifestyle. She was celebrated for having undertaken an irrigation project around Mecca (for which there is no evidence). As the story goes, she created clever ways to provide water to parched Hajjis during their long journey through the desert; hence the route bearing her name. Tales of her exploits wound up in the anthology of Middle Eastern legends, "A Thousand And One Nights"—an indication of the apocryphal nature of most accounts about her. The route-in-question began in Baghdad, went to Kufa, down through the Nafud desert, then—via Ha'il in the Nejd—continued over to Medina (the old "Yathrib"); and—finally—down to Mecca. When, exactly, the route was ACTUALLY established is anyone's guess.

What we DO know is that the ancient city of Duma[tha] would have played a role along the old Roman "Limes Arabicus"—a route located on the eastern frontier of Arabia Petraea.}

{13 Absence of evidence should not automatically be taken as evidence of absence; as we must always be aware of the possibility that there is evidence which has not yet been found. But sometimes it CAN be taken as evidence of absence—particularly instances in which one cannot find any evidence precisely where one would expect to find oodles of evidence (if, that is, the narrative-in-question were true). Once it is established that "If proposition (X) were true, then one would almost certainly find empirical clues (Y)"; then a conclusive absence of Y brings into serious question the credence of X. This is especially the case when Y necessarily ensues from X.}

{14 During the First World War, the British forged a strategic alliance with the king of the Hijaz, Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi (who also served as the sharif of Mecca)…pushing the Ottoman Turks out of the Arabian peninsula. Hence the famed exploits of T.E. Lawrence (and the breakout role of Peter O'Toole in 1962). Al-Hashimi ruled western Arabia until the House of Saud overtook the region in 1924; at which point his dynasty was granted sovereignty over the newly-designated country of Jordan. Wahhabis—through their patrons in the House of Saud—thereby became the custodians of both Mecca and Medina. The rest is history.}

{15 Timna was the site of famed Egyptian copper mines during the Bronze and Iron Ages. A temple to the goddess, Hathor was erected there. It was later occupied by the Midianites, who's tabernacle at that location may have inspired the Abrahamic tabernacles used by the early Israelites (i.e. Judah-ites).}

{16 Duma[tha] (alt. "Dumat al-Jundal") was originally known as "Adummatu" by the Assyrians; and was purportedly the ancestral home of the Qedarites. Associated with the Banu Qudah, it was located in the Nafud desert. The aforementioned oasis settlement of Tayma may have served as a way-station along the caravan route between Duma[tha] and Yathrib.}

{17 Interestingly, Ma'an seems to have been named after Lot's son…indicating it would have been located not far from Sodom…which means it is near the place where Lot's wife was turned to salt. In other words: It is in the vicinity of where MoM would have taken his daily strolls. To this day, some Palestinians honor an ancient tradition—inherited from days of yore—whereby Abraham is said to be buried at a location known as "Al-Khalila Allah" [friend of god]. Where might that be located? Near Hebron (that is: NOT in the Hijaz).}

{18 It is possible that the etymology of "Gerrha" is related to "Hagar". In Old South Arabian, the "ha" could serve as either a prefix or a suffix. So we find two versions of a modified "G-R". Other etymologies are possible. The Semitic term for "expel" or "turn away" was "hagah"—which makes sense, as the Biblical character was, indeed, expelled. "Hagar" could have been a variation on "Hegra": the ancient Lihyanite—then Nabatean—city in the northern Hijaz. Meanwhile, Dilmun in eastern Arabia was referred to as "Gerrha" by the Greeks. This might be a variant of the name of the Dilmunite city, "Akarum" [alt. "Agarum"] in northeastern Arabia (later referred to as "Al-Ahsa" / "Al-Hasa")—which, at the time, was occupied by the Syriac-speaking "Lakhmids". (The city was also known as "Pit-Ardashir".) The early Mohammedans may have alternately referred to that city as "Hajar"…which poses a quandary, as that is similar to the Arabic moniker for Hegra: "Al-Hijr".}

{19 Tayma was located roughly between the port-city of Leuke Kome and the settlement of Ha'il (at the southern edge of the Nafud)—that is: about 230 kilometers southeast of Tabawa [Tabuk]. The Kedarites ruled from Tayma for well over a millennium; and spoke Aramaic—as attested by inscriptions there from the 6th century B.C. During Classical Antiquity, they were frequently in conflict with the Lihyanites of

Dedan (located slightly to their south). The Arab city played a prominent role in Biblical lore. For example, Isaiah invited the people of Tayma to provide water and food for the diaspora of Judah-ites during the Exilic Period (Isaiah 21:13-14). During Late Antiquity, Tayma was predominantly Jewish. The famed (Arab) Jewish poet, Samaw'al ben Adiya lived there in the early 6th century; and the early Mohammedans would surely have been familiar with his (Syriac) material. Note that Duma[tha] (located at the southern end of the Wadi Sirhan) was also considered a Kedarite capital at certain times. Heading south from Duma[tha], the Tayma oasis would have been a stop on the caravan route to Hegra [Mada'in Salih]: about 275 kilometers to Tayma, then another 130 kilometers to Hegra. The route would have then led down to Dedan [Al-Ula] (just 23 kilometers farther south), and then to another Jewish settlement at Khaybar (210 kilometers more). Caravans could have ventured even farther south, to yet another Jewish settlement: Yathrib (which was 160 kilometers from Khaybar). Tayma's location is quite telling; as it shows Aramaic—then Nabataean Syriac—was used by Arabs as far southeast as the Nafud. In fact, there is a temple from the 2nd century with Nabataean Syriac inscriptions at "Ruwafa" (located about 110 kilometers south of Tabawa). For more on these incredible archeological discoveries, see "Arabs And Empires Before Islam", edited by Greg Fischer.}

{20 Another thing archeologists have found: The residents of Petra believed in an afterlife, as bounty was left in their tombs. In 1993, scrolls were discovered that date back to the pre-Islamic period. Their content has yet to be divulged. God only knows how much has been found that has never been disclosed to the public; or was even destroyed by those who preferred that certain things never be brought to light.}

{21 The town was founded by the Nabataeans in the 4th century as "Khalus" (rendered "Chellous" in Greek), variants of which included "Elusa", "Halasa", and "Haluza". It was then Arabized to "Al-Khalasa". I explore the Syriac etymology of the names of several Ishmaelite cities in "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text".}

{22 By then, archaic port cities like Dor and Ugarit had long before fallen into ruins. Palestinian port-cities located more to the south, in the central part of the Levantine coast—like Caesarea Maritima, Sozusa Palaestina (Arsuf), Yapu (Jaffa), Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ganza (Gaz[z]a)—had a more complex history; as I discuss in my essay, "The Land Of Purple". The same goes for other ancient Canaanite cities like Saphed, Gezer, Gath, Gibeon, Ebla, Eglon, Aphek, Arpad, Beth-El / Luz, Ekron, Rakisha / Lachish, Timna[t]h, Megiddo, Samaria, Hebron, and Jericho / Ariha. Hazor (now Tel Waqqas) was perhaps the largest Canaanite city in the Bronze and Iron Ages, yet it is hardly accounted for in Islamic lore. (Why not deliver the final revelation THERE?) Jerusalem's history is probably the MOST complex, as I discuss in my essay, "City Of The Beloved". For the present purposes, what we're focused on is the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: the demise of the Nabataeans qua Nabataeans and the emergence of the Mohammedan movement (i.e. early Islam).}

{23 The "Jabal an-Nmayr" is a gigantic, buried structure that was discovered in 2016 using satellite imaging technology. It is a reminder of how much about Rakmu / Petra still has yet to be known. The problem is that archeology in Dar al-Islam is as tried-and-true as the Tibetan coast guard. Indeed, (genuine) scholars must navigate the myriad constraints of Middle Eastern monarchies to get anything done. Meanwhile, those in power—beholden as they are to religious precedent—hold sway in what does and doesn't see the light of day. If something brings into serious question the credence of the traditional Islamic narrative, it is likely to be (re-)buried. So we're left scavenging for table-scraps, hoping an insight leaks through here and there.}

{24 There are myriad candidates for the Nabataean offshoots that served as the kernel for the Mohammedan movement—from the Banu Kalb to the Banu Amilah; and perhaps even the Banu Judham. The man referred to as "Mu-H-M-D" may have come from the Banu Tayy—a tribe that might or might not

have been Nabataean. Those affiliated with the Banu Tayy [alt. "Ta'i"] were referred to as the "Tayyaye" in Syriac—an ethnonym that seems to have been used as a synecdoche for all Ishmaelites. The provenance of the Ghassanid dynasty is murky; so their relation to Nabataean heritage remains unclear. We know that in the late 5th / early 6th century, the Ghassanid leader, Al-Harith IV hailed from Hegra ("Al-Hijr"). He is known for defeating the Salihids (an Arab tribe to the east) and converting from Miaphysite to Chalcedonian Christianity. Prior to that, the genealogy disappears into a haze; as virtually all of their leaders—going back to c. 220—are referred to as "Al-Nu'man", "Al-Mundhir", or "Al-Harith" (with a few men named "Jabala" thrown into the mix). They may have ALSO come from the Banu Tayy. But what of their relation to the (Syriac-speaking) Tanukhids? And what of the Palmyrene rulers, Odaenathus and Zenobia (c. 260-272)? This is all shrouded in the mists of history.}

{25 What of the black stone? This was a meteorite that was worshipped by pagan Bedouins long before the advent of Islam. It was eventually incorporated into the Islamic repertoire of veneration. According to the legend, it was originally a WHITE stone, but became increasingly tarnished as menstruating women touched it over the years; which is why it is now black (ref. the tafsir of Zamakhshari).}

{26 The Syrian philosopher, Yamliku of Khalkis (a.k.a. "Iamblichus"), who taught in Apamea in the late 3rd and early 4th century, was an Arab; as was his teacher, Anatolius of Laodicea. Being Romans, they would have spoken Greek and Latin. They are a reminder that ethnic Arabs—as well as Armenians and Kurds—resided in the Levant through Late Antiquity. At the time, when someone mentioned "Arabs", people did not think of anything south of Midian; they thought of Nabataeans.}

{27 Those at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula ("Arabia Felix") were characterized in a variety of ways. Whether "Sabaeans", "Himyarites", "Kahtanites", or "Minaeans", they were likely descendants of the "Katabanians". Note that many of these ethnonyms were derived from Biblical figures. For example, "Sabaean" is attributed to Saba, son of Yashjub ben Ya'rub. Ya'rub's father was "Kahtan"; hence the "Kahtanites". Saba's son was Himyar; hence the "Himyarites". Meanwhile, the term "Minaeans" stems from an affiliation with the Sabaean ruler of Ma'in: Karib-El Watar (son of Damar-El Yanuf III) from the 7th century B.C. The "El" in his name likely referred to the deity, Almakah—variously associated with the sun, the moon, and bulls (possibly a spin-off of the archaic moon god, Amm). Karib-El Watar was mentioned in the Sabaean inscription on the Great Temple at Sirwah. (The original name of Ma'in was "Karnawu". Recall that the other major Yemeni cities at the time would have been Ma'rib, Nasha'an, Najran, Nashak, Zafar, Timna, and Azal / Sana'a.) The history of this region is shrouded in the mists of ancient Arabian folklore—including an array of fabricated genealogies having to do with the Tayy, Judham, Kindah, Madhhaj, and Azd (esp. the Khazraj, Aws, and Khuza'a). For example, Kahtan was said to be a son of [h]Eber…who was re-named "Hud" and identified as an Ad-ite (rather than as the eponymous patriarch of the Hebrews). Ad was purportedly the son of Uz ben Aram. Aram would have been the eponymous patriarch of the Aramaeans; and was said to have been one of the sons of Shem ben Noah…which would make Aram's progeny Semites. The Ishmaelites were supposed to have come INSTEAD from the progeny of Adnan…who correspond to the people who came to be known as "Kedarites"…who, in turn, were dubbed "Edomites" and/or "Midianites" in Judaic lore (spec. when hailing from the southern frontier of the Levant, in contradistinction to Arabs in trans-Jordan who dwelled in the Biblical lands of Aram, Ammon, and Moab). The denizens of Edom (which simply means "Red") were believed to be the progeny of Jacob's brother, Esau. Meanwhile, Ammonites and Moabites were seen as the progeny of Lot (via incest with his daughters). Much of this ancient folklore tends to elide more than illuminate. For more on these genealogical shenanigans, see my essay, "Genesis Of A People".}

{28 Lo and behold, the language in which the Koran was first composed was referred to as "Arabiyyah" by the authors of the Koran. This was NOT Classical Arabic. Note that the general term for Aramaic was "Aramaya" and for Syriac was "Suryaya". The Mesopotamian dialect was dubbed "Nahraya" (as

Mesopotamia was known as “Nahra-in”, meaning “between rivers”); while the literary style that would be developed in Urhay [Edessa] would come to be known as “Urhaya”. There were also a Samaritan and Babylonian variants of Old Aramaic…from which Hebrew was derived. Classical Arabic derived from Nabataean Syriac (i.e. the “Arabiyyah” referred to in the Koran.) The term “Nabataean Arabic” is misleading. The Nabataeans spoke—and wrote—in SYRIAC. Hence it was Nabatean SYRIAC…which eventually led to Classical Arabic. I explore this philology further in my essay on “The Syriac Origins Of The Koran”.}

{29 Note that, according to Mohammedan lore, the Kedarites were the progeny of Ishmael’s son, Nebayot[h]…who bore Kedar. Specifically, they were the progeny of Kedar’s son, Ad[a]b-El [grief of god]. The names of subsequent descendants reflect archaic Arab cities like Tayma [alt. “Tema”] and Duma[h].}

{30 The subtitle of the book was “Wa Ma Ja?a Fi-ha Min Al-Athar”, which roughly translates to “And That Which Came From (One) Who Is Pious”. The work was supposedly transmitted in the 10th century by an amanuensis named Al-Khuzai. However, the earliest manuscripts are from the Late Middle Ages. So god only knows who actually first wrote it; or when. The book was purportedly referenced by Ibn Abbas, Wahb ibn Munabbih, and Ibn Ishaq…though there is no hard evidence of this, as their writing—insofar as it may have really existed—is long lost. All we have are redactions of their work from long after they lived.}

{31 The progenitor of the Quraysh was purportedly Qusayy ibn Kilab ibn Murrah ibn Ka’b ibn Luay ibn Ghalib ibn Fihr ibn Malik, reputed custodian of the pre-Islamic Meccan cube. This puts Qusayy ibn Kilab in line with another fabled figure: Fihr ibn Malik, who was the son of Al-Nadr ibn Kinana ibn Khuzayma ibn Mudrika ibn Ilyas ibn Mudar ibn Nizar. (Nizar was the reputed son of Ma’ad ibn Adnan.) Fihr ibn Malik was ALSO said to have been a custodian of the pre-Islamic Meccan cube in the 230’s. Other tribes likewise had fabricated provenance—notably: a Kindite offshoot that came to be dubbed the Banu Mudar (named after the son of Nizar). As the story goes, the Mudar begat the Qays ibn Aylan—which yielded a panoply of tribal offshoots that are encountered in Mohammedan lore. The conflation of Kedarites and Yemenis was thereby instantiated. The result of this is an ethnographic concoction that sets the stage for the geo-political fictions on which Mohammedan lore is based.}

{32 Again, the Nabataeans—who thrived primarily in what was also known as the “Arabah”—were sometimes referred to as the “Kedarites”. This area correlated with what was known as “Se’ir” in Biblical nomenclature. The Amalekites (the progeny of Amalek, himself a descendent of Esau) dwelled on the Sinai peninsula and in the Negev. They pre-dated the Edomites (seen as OTHER progeny of Esau), who were supposedly vanquished by Joshua. Per Biblical accounts, other precursors to the Edomites were “Horites” and “Kenites”. To make matters more complicated, such pre-Edomic peoples also included the “Shasu” and “Apiru”…who were likely the first Yah-weh-ists (that is: progenitors of the Israelites / Hebrews; see Footnote 34 below). ALL these people dwelled in what came to be known as Edom / Idumaea and Midian–that is: what would eventually be land of the “Nabatu” (Nabataea). When expositors of Classical and Late Antiquity refer to “Arabs”, THAT is who they were talking about. The irony is that those Arabs were originally of the same (Edomic) peoples as the progenitors of the Israelites / Hebrews.}

{33 Midian is mentioned in passing in a few other places (20:40, 22:44, and 28:44-45). Many verses mention A[a]d and Thamud without mentioning Midian. The identity of “A[a]d” is indeterminate. In 26:128, the Koran mentions that it boasted structures erected on high places. It is often correlated with the fabled “Iram dhat al-imd” [Iram, settlement of the pillars]; and is where the prophet “Hud” was sent. Thamud is described as the place where people carved out the rocks in the valley (89:9, likely referring to Dedan and/or Hegra); and is where the prophet “Saleh” was sent (7:73, 11:61, and 27:45)…which was,

indeed, to “Al-Hijr” (Hegra), per 15:80-84. We are told over and over again that A[a]d and Thamud were peoples who rebuffed god and/or the Abrahamic prophets, so were punished—as in 14:9-10, 22:42, 25:38, 26:141, 29:38, 38:12-13, 40:30-31, 41:13/17, 50:12, 51:41-43, 53:50-51, 69:4-5, 89:6-9, and 91:10-11. Clearly, the authors of the Koran wanted to disassociate themselves from their (pagan) Nabataean forebears. Shared provenance would have belied the justification for diverging theological paths. The giveaway, of course, is that the (Mohammedan) Ishmaelites never account for the Nabataeans in their historiography…which would be inexplicable had the Nabataeans been OTHER THAN. The trick, then, was not to distinguish the Banu Kinana (of which the Quraysh were a part) from the Nabataeans; but to erase the latter from the official record altogether. Hence the very existence of the Nabataeans aren’t even acknowledged in Islamic historiography.}

{34 The Midianites and Edomites may have been the first people to worship Yah-weh. Indeed, the “Shasu” of the Jezreel Valley were likely the progenitors of the first Israelites. The original denizens of (what came to be called) Jerusalem were the Jebusites. The Midianite tent-shrine at Timna seems to have been a precursor to the Hebrew tabernacle. And other than the Shasu, a prime candidate for the progenitors of the Israelites were the “Apiru” (alt. “[h]Abiru”). This ethnonym shares the same early Semitic root with “Hebrew”: [h]E-B-R[u]. Note that Edomic peoples were alternately dubbed “Zam-zum-ites”, which may have been the source of the Islamic tales of the “Zam-zam well”. What does all this mean? It turns out that those who came to be the “Israelites” / “Hebrews” and those who came to be dubbed “Ishmaelites” / “Saracens” may have originated as the same (Edomic) people…at some point during the Iron Age. Over time, ethnic divisions prompted the need for fabricated genealogies (ensuring feuding tribes did not have a common provenance). Shared bloodlines would have made it more difficult to account for separate ethnicities. How else to explain conflicting tribal agendas? To legitimize disparate destinies; it is necessary to concoct disparate legacies. Hence the progeny of Jacob vis a vis the progeny of Esau to distinguish between “Israel” and the dreaded “Edomites”…a more palpable genealogical bifurcation than that of Isaac vs. Ishmael.}

{35 The statement is from his book, “Al-Muktafi fi Al-waqf wa Al-ibtida fi Kitab Allah [Aza wa Jalla]”. This roughly translates: “The Adequacy Of Pausing And Commencing [with respect to] The Book Of God”. The subtitle’s two words are a bit complicated. “Aza” has several connotations—including consolation, gratitude, triumph, and rejoicing. “Jalla” means reverence / exaltation / praise. The fact that none of the four (fabled) Uthmanic manuscripts was not sent to Mecca is quite telling. Was there a Mecca to send it TO?}

{36 I explore the onomastic and linguistic backgrounds of relevant peoples in my essay, “The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text”. To characterize any of these languages as an “early form of Arabic” is erroneous. Prior to Mohammedan hegemony, those who dwelled in southern Arabia had a difference provenance than those who dwelled in northern Arabia. Therefore, categorizing them both as pre-Islamic “Arabs” is misleading.}

{37 The only ETHNIC link between the two peoples would have been long before the relevant timeframe. It would have occurred via the Minaeans: a somewhat theoretical Yemeni kingdom that ended in the early 2nd century B.C. That archaic people operated out of a long-lost city known as ***Karnawu***; and would have spoken an early incarnation of Old South Arabian. They would have primarily interacted with the Sabaeans to the west (in Abyssinia) as well as the Hadhramites (who’s capital was an archaic city known as ***Shabwa[t]***) to the east. They would have known the Lihyanites only through maritime trade up and down the Red Sea. Evidently, the Minaeans exported not only frankincense and myrrh; they exported the worship of a deity known as “Wadd[um]” (alt. “Wadd-Ab”) to the Lihyanite city of Dedan.}

APPENDIX 1:

Jeddah And Other Port Cities On The Red Sea

What came to be called ***"Jeddah"*** seems to have been a coastal settlement of the Banu Kalb (who's capital was the old Kedarite city of ***Duma[tha]***, farther inland and slightly to the north). It may have possibly been a Tanukhid settlement during much of Late Antiquity. Being members of the Quda'a, its residents would have spoken Syriac. Of course, it would eventually become a major commercial port–pursuant to the rise of the Abbasids. The question is: Why THEN?

It's worth doing a brief survey of the region's ports.

The next Arabian port to the north was ***Charmutha*** (located near present-day Yanbu); and farther north still was ***Leuke Kome*** (located west of Tabuk, near present-day Aynuna). These were BOTH used by the Nabataeans for maritime trade. The next Arabian port to the south was FAR to the south, in Himar: ***Muza*** (now the Yemeni port-city, Mokha). ALL trade between Himyar and Nabataea was done VIA BOAT on the Red Sea—primarily between Muza and Leuke Kome. No caravan routes were used in the Hijazi desert between Himyar and Nabataea because that would have been asinine. Indeed, the Himyarites and Nabataeans were civil with one another primarily due to their MARITIME trade.

Note that ***Trinkitat*** was not the only port across the Red Sea. Other port cities along the Abyssinian coast included ***Berenike Epi-Deires*** and ***Aydhab*** slightly to the north (on the Egyptian coast). The main port at the northern end of the Red Sea was the ancient Elamite city of ***Aila***; which was referred to as "Elath" in the Hebrew Bible; and is now known as "Aqaba". That port was strategically located at the southern-most edge of Canaan (120 kilometers south of Petra), providing the best access to and from the Red Sea. Another primary Nabataean port on the Sinai was at the location that came to be known as "Dahab".

Meanwhile, ***Zeila*** (alt. Zayla; [h]Avala[h] / Avalites), ***Adulis***, ***[s]Ophir***, ***Malao*** (Berbera), ***Berenike Troglodytika***, and ***Berenike Pan-chrysos*** would have been slightly more to the south (on the Nubian / Ethiopian coast).

Ports like ***Mundus***, ***Mosullon*** (alt. Mosylon / Mossylum), ***Candala***, ***Opone***, and ***Essina*** were located on the African horn (on the Somali coast). ***Eudaemon Arabia*** (now known as "Aden") was on the southeastern coast of Himyar. All THOSE ports would have been south of the "Bab al-Mandeb" (Gateway of Lamentation), and thus beyond the Red Sea (though still within the ambit of what was known as the "Erythraean Sea"). For a description of the maritime routes in ancient times, refer to the Byzantine "Periplous tes Erythras Thalasses" (Latin: "Periplus Maris Erythraei") from the 10th century. For the ancient onomastics of this sea, see Footnote 9 above.

To conclude: The need for Jeddah as a major port would have only arisen once caravans were required for locations farther inland in the central Hijaz. This would not have made any sense until Mecca was established as Islam's temenos—on the way to the town of ***Wajj*** (a.k.a. "Ta'if"), which was located in a lush garden valley beyond the "Tihama[h]" (Hijazi coastal plain); across the Sarawat mountains. Sure enough, that development occurred in the 8th century.

The timeline of Jeddah's sudden efflorescence gives us an indication of the timing of Mecca's founding.

APPENDIX 2:

Ibn Battuta's Fabled Travels

According to the "Rihla", Ibn Battuta visited Mecca three times. Such accounts are dubious. Let's do a brief re-cap of his (alleged) journey.

The first visit supposedly occurred c. 1326, when he was 22 years old. Hailing from the Marinid sultanate in Morocco, he traversed the Maghreb to the port-city of Alexandria in Mamluk Egypt. As the story goes, after visiting Cairo, he went to the port-city of Aydhab…from which he traveled to…Damascus. From there, he ventured eastward all the way into the Ilkhanate of Persia. We are told that it was between Damascus and Persia that he visited Medina and Mecca. This makes no sense. Clearly, had he wanted to visit Mecca, traversing the Red Sea from Aydhab would have been the prime occasion. What is most likely: He went to Aydhab to sail up to Aila (Aqaba), from which he would follow the established route up to Syria. A trip to Damascus would have made perfect sense.

In any case, on his way back from Persia the next year, Ibn Battuta stopped in Baghdad, then headed north to Tabriz. From there, he ventured to Nineveh / Kurdistan. His path took him from Sinjar to Mosul, and then back to Baghdad. Next, he traveled all the way down to Yemen (at the time, ruled by the Rasulids). The second visit to Mecca supposedly occurred during that trip (in the late 1320's); yet, again, this is unlikely, as he would have SAILED from the port-city of Aila (Aqaba) to the Yemeni port-city of Muza (Mokha). He then went the Yemeni port-city of Eudaemon Arabia (Aden); and, from there, he sailed to the port-city of Zeila on the African Horn…at which point he visited the capital of the Ajuran Sultanate (Sarapion; a.k.a. "Mogadishu"). He then ventured down the Swahili coast to Kilwa Kisiwani. From there, he supposedly visited Mecca for the third time (c. 1330).

His next travels brought him to the far north, through Anatolia (where he purportedly visited Iconium and Erzurum)…and then north-eastward, up through the Caucuses, to the capital of the Kipchak Khanate, Astrakhan (in the domain of the Golden Horde). In 1333, he joined an expedition from Astrakhan to the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. We are told that he then returned to Astrakhan, whereupon he decided to venture deeper into the Eurasian Steppes, where he visited Sarai.

(Or so the story goes.)

Next, we are told that he traveled the Silk Road to Balkh and Bukhara…before finally ending up at the capital of the Chagatai Khanate: Samarkand. Thereafter, he purportedly ventured across the Hindu Kush into northern India, where he visited the Sultanate of Delhi. From there, we're told that he traveled south to the Kingdom of Kozhikode (Calicut) in the Malabar region of India…before going to…China. According to the official story, he eventually made it as far southeast as Malacca on the Malay Peninsula. And what then? Well, the next we hear, he is suddenly back in Morocco. (!) From there, he would go north into Andalusia; then south into the Mali Empire. His last sojourn involved accompanying a caravan transporting 600 female slaves back to Morocco from the Kingdom of Takedda.

So what's the REAL story? It is possible that he made it as far as Samarkand. It's more likely, though, that after he visited Constantinople in 1333, he headed back to the Magreb (rather than, as the story goes, to the farthest southeast reaches of Asia). Because so many of his exploits were farcical, what with all the cribbing from earlier sources, it is not unreasonable to assume that the purported visits to Mecca were likewise confabulations.