

THE MECCA QUESTION

A review of section six of *Qur'anic Geography*
(Subtitled: *A survey of the geographical references in the Qur'an*, by Dan Gibson and published by Independent Scholar's Press, 2011)

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by Jeremy Smyth

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This review has been approved by Dan Gibson, the author of *Qur'anic Geography*, and he has agreed that its contents are a just presentation of what he presents in the last section of his book.

ISBN: 978-0-9867144-4-3

This book is intended to be distributed free of charge, and is provided so that readers can understand some of the arguments contained in the book *Qur'anic Geography*. If you would like a copy of this book, please contact Independent Scholars Press at their website: www.indipress.ca.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a review of the last section of Dan Gibson's academic book: *Qur'anic Geography*. The original book is 470 pages with over 170 illustrations, time lines, and multiple appendices and bibliographies. It is available in hard cover from Independent Scholars Press (<http://www.indipress.ca>) The original book examines the various geographical references in the Qur'an with whole sections given over to the People of 'Ad, the People of Thamud, Midian, Medina, and Pre-Islamic Arabia. These sections are not referred to in this review.

Rather, this book addresses the final section of *Qur'anic Geography* which focusses on the Holy City of Islam. It is in this section that Gibson presents his findings that the city of Petra in Jordan was the first and original Holy City of Islam and that it wasn't until several hundred years after the death of Muhammad, that Abbasid rulers in Iraq endorsed the village of Mecca in Saudi Arabia as Islam's holy city. At first, this theory sounds unbelievable, but Gibson presents overwhelming archeological, literary and historical evidence to support his position. While most people will never read the original academic study, it is hoped that through this review, you will be introduced to the study, and better understand what academics and Muslim scholars are wrestling with.

Dan Gibson, the author of *Qur'anic Geography* is a Canadian historian who has spent a life-time studying the history of the Arabian peninsula. He is the author of a dozen books, including *The Nabataeans*, *Builders of Petra*, as well as many papers and articles. He may be reached through the forum at www.searchformecca.com.

His website: <http://nabataea.net> has gained worldwide attention, both for its scope and depth in presenting the early civilizations of the Arabian Peninsula. After spending several decades in the Arabian peninsula Mr. Gibson and his family reside in Canada where he continues to research and write.

I

Every day, five times a day, over a billion Muslims bow down and recite a prayer to Allah, given to them by Muhammad their prophet. Every day, five times a day, they face a black rock in far off Mecca, and submit themselves afresh to the religion of Islam. Every day, five times a day, they bow as a corporate group, all around the world, to express their solidarity as followers of Islam, for whom Muhammad is their prophet, and the Qur'an is their scriptures and the Ka'ba is their holy place.

For fourteen hundred years Muslims have prayed towards the Holy City of Mecca without anyone questioning this act of faith... that is until now. The book you are reading is a review of several chapters from an academic survey of the geography of the Qur'an that was published in 2011 which claims that Petra, a city in southern Jordan, and over a thousand kilometers north of Mecca, was actually the original Holy City of Islam.

Most people are surprised to discover that the city of Mecca is mentioned only once in the Qur'an (Sura 48). Qur'anic commentators have also traditionally linked one reference to the Valley of Bekka (or "valley of the one who weeps much") in Sura 3:96 with Mecca as well. There are also references in the Qur'an to the *sacred place*, the *Ka'ba*, and *the house*; terms which are universally associated with Mecca today. Nevertheless, the Qur'an itself does not tell us in so many words that the Ka'ba was located in Mecca. In this small booklet we will take a brief look at Gibson's claim that archeology as well as early Islamic writings all point to Petra, not Mecca as the Muslim's Holy City.

Muslim scholars see no reason to doubt what is commonly believed about Mecca's location, but in recent years, some historians have raised questions. For example, Dr. Patricia Crone in her book *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* noted that the descriptions of Mecca in Islamic literature don't seem to match the present day location of Mecca. For instance early Islamic literature describes the Holy City as the "mother of all cities." This term brings to mind either a large and impressive city or a city of great antiquity. In 2002 Gibson

asked several leading Jordanian and Saudi archeologists about the archeological record in and around Mecca. While not wishing to be quoted or named publicly, they admitted that the Meccan archeological record before 900 AD is basically non-existent. Gibson had expected them to defend the opinion that ancient Mecca was a walled city with houses, gardens, public buildings and temples. They shook their heads and said, "There was nothing like that there."

The Holy City is also described as the "center of the trade route." There are numerous occasions where caravans are mentioned as coming and going from the Holy City, and indeed Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib was a merchant who regularly sent caravans out on trading missions. While Muslims are adamant that Mecca was the center of the trade route, modern historians give us a different picture. Dr. Patricia Crone tells us:

"Mecca was a barren place, and barren places do not make natural halts, and least of all when they are found at a short distance from famously green environments. Why should caravans have made a steep descent to the barren lands of Mecca when they could have stopped at Ta'if?"

Most Muslims and some western scholars have imagined that the caravans carried incense, spices, and other exotic goods, but according to research by Kister and Sprenger, the age of frankincense was over and the Arabs now engaged in a trade of leather and clothing; hardly items which could have founded or maintained a commercial empire of international dimensions.

If the Holy City was such a large city, then it is strange that the name Mecca is missing on early maps. One would expect that a major merchant city in Arabia would be mentioned in early times. Such maps never claimed to show every village and settlement, but certainly sought to place significant and famous cities. Surprising as it may seem, not one map before 900 AD even mentions Mecca. This is 300 years after Muhammad's death.

Over the years Gibson has gathered copies of many ancient maps of Arabia and has diligently translated and transcribed them, but never once is Mecca mentioned.

Added to this the Qur'an and the hadiths clearly speak of Mecca being in a valley, and as having another smaller valley or stream next to the Ka'ba. This is quite different from modern day Mecca which has been occasionally flooded with spring runoff but contains no stream.

Over the years Gibson has spoken to pilgrims coming from Mecca. Some of them have been vaguely dissatisfied with the geography around Mecca. The Holy City is described as being surrounded by mountains where people could look down into the city to see the Yemeni elephant attacking the Ka'ba. In Mecca today the nearest small outcropping of rocks is half a kilometer away

from the Ka'ba with a gradual slope to the top. There are no recorded fortifications on this mountain. The rest of the mountains are more than three kilometers away. Would an elephant even be visible at this distance? How much of the battles could you actually see?

Many pilgrims have been disappointed with the two mountains called Safa and Marwah. They are so small that today they are totally enclosed inside of the mosque building. In the times before Islam two idols or places of worship are described as being on top of each of these mountains. Today there is no evidence of these idols, neither idol bases, inscriptions, walls, gates or stairs to climb the mountain.

In Islamic literature Mount Hira faced the city and was located in the *upper part of Mecca*. However, today Mount Hira is a considerable distance from the Ka'ba and does not face the city.

In early Islamic literature Mecca is described as having a high and low side, and a road from one side to the other. Today Mecca is located in a flat open area, with low rocky mountains rising from the sand. There is no low or high side, indicating to us that the early Islamic writers were speaking of some other location and not the Mecca of today.

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

Al Tabari relates the story of how 'Abdallah, the father of Muhammad visited a wife whom he had in addition to Aminah. He had been working in the soil and traces of soil were still on him when he invited her to lie with him. She made him wait because of this. He went out, performed his ablutions, washed off the clay which was on him and went to Aminah's quarters instead. And so Muhammad was conceived. R. B. Serjeant in his comments on Alfred Guillaume's translation of the same story in the *Sirah* is puzzled by this discrepancy as the Arabic word used here specifically means a cultivated plot or field, and refers to clay and loam. He then notes that there was no cultivable land near Mecca. Once again, the ancient descriptions do not match Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Then there are references to both the *districts of Mecca* and *trees in Mecca*, but the ancient village of Mecca left a very small archeological footprint and didn't have much for districts, let alone trees. There are also references to the ancient Holy City having fruit trees and grapes growing in and around it. Once again, it is hard to imagine this happening where Mecca is located today.

The Holy City also produced large armies. Apparently Mecca had no trouble raising large numbers of men to work large caravans and march in their armies. Gibson documents how Mecca repeatedly raised hundreds of soldiers, thousands of camels, and once over 10,000 Meccan soldiers who attacked Medina. When one considers the number of soldiers and camels that the Meccans could raise despite their losses in battles year after year, one would expect the Holy City to be a large city. However, archeological evidence leads us to believe that Mecca was a small place in a harsh environment. How then could it have produced such armies?

Gibson points out that all of these things have caused archeologists and historians to feel that there are major discrepancies between the ancient descriptions of Mecca and what we know about Mecca's history.

It is also commonly accepted that Mecca was not just a major city, but it was the focus of pilgrimages in Arabia long before the rise of Islam. While there is little evidence of an early shrine at Mecca, Gibson points out that every historian of Arabia knows that pilgrimages were always made to the Nabataean city of Petra, which was known as the original *haram* or *forbidden area of Arabia* where killing was not allowed.

So while there were several sacred places in Arabia, Petra stands out as the main sacred places where burials also took place, making it the primary holy place or *forbidden sanctuary* in ancient Arabia.

The Islamic historian Al Tabari, writing in 900 AD, notes that during the days before Islam, there were two pilgrimages. The lesser was known as *'umrah*. He notes that 'Abd al-Muttalib (Muhammad's grandfather) performed *'umrah* on one occasion. This was at a time when the forbidden sanctuary in the Islamic Holy City held many pagan idols, among them Hubal and Isaf and Na'ilah. The Qur'an tells us that these pre-Islamic pagan pilgrimages were known respectively as *hajj* and *'umrah*, commonly called the greater and lesser pilgrimage. These names continued from pre-Islamic times into the Islamic era and are the terms used today for the two yearly Islamic pilgrimages.

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

Gibson also raises issues about the Muslim *qibla*. Today all mosques are not only aligned to face the direction of prayer, but they all have an architectural feature built in to emphasise it. The *qibla* is the direction of prayer that all Muslims face, and every mosque today has a niche (*mihrab*) built in the qibla wall to provide clear indication of the direction of Mecca. The very earliest mosques however did not have the *mihrab niche*, as they were simply aligned in such a way that when the faithful faced the *qibla wall* they automatically faced the Holy City of Islam.

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

In Islam, it is universally understood that the qibla was changed and this change is referred to in the Qur'an. The text of the Qur'an itself does not give the name of the place to which prayer was originally made, nor does it name the place to which it was switched, nor when the switch occurred. According to Al Tabari writing in 920 AD, when the subject of qibla came up during pre-Islamic days, Muhammad directed them to pray towards Syria. Gibson documents that the Qur'an, early hadiths and early Islamic histories never say that the qibla was towards Jerusalem. Mention of Jerusalem as the qibla doesn't appear in Islamic literature until over 300 years after Muhammad died. All of the early records simply state that Muhammad prayed towards Syria. If he did pray towards Jerusalem, it would seem strange that the records would not state Jerusalem, since it was a known and important center at the time. Muhammad continued with this original qibla until February 624 when Islamic sources note that Muhammad changed the qibla towards Mecca.

Archeology backs up the changing of the qibla. There are many early mosques that faced a direction other than Mecca. Gibson has carefully studied these early mosques, providing details of their construction, their qiblas, and often aerial or satellite photographs. He began his study of early mosques thinking that the first handful of mosques built during Muhammad's lifetime would help him determine the original focus of Muhammad's prayers. However, he was shocked to discover that for over a hundred years after Muhammad's death, many newly constructed mosques continued to point to Syria. Using these mosques he was able to draw lines on a map to discover where they intersected. By examining the dates of the construction of these mosques, he also realized that the Islamic date of February 624, during Muhammad's lifetime was incorrect as archeology clearly proved that the qibla was changed much

later. Each of these mosques is fully documented in Gibson's academic book *Qur'anic Geography*, and available from <http://indipress.ca/feature.html>.

<h2>The Changing of the Qibla</h2>		
100% point to Petra (of those mosques we could determine)	12 % point to Petra 50 % point to Mecca 38 % point parallel	100 % point to Mecca
Petra	Confusion	Mecca
1 AH - 107 AH 622 AD - 725 AD	107 AH - 207 AH 725 AD - 822 AD	207 AH - Present 822AD - Present
2nd Civil War	Abbasid rule begins	

II

In the book *Qur'anic Geography*, Gibson lists as many early mosques as he could find according to the date they were built, and indicates the direction of their qibla. In some cases he provides aerial photographs which illustrate the direction of Mecca and also the direction of the Petra region where he believe the first Holy City existed.

For instance, in Saudi Arabia there is a mosque known as the Mosque of the Two Qiblas. It is remembered as the place where a companion leading prayers was told of the change of qibla. He did a 180 degree turn and he is said to have been commanded to change the direction of prayer (qibla) from Jerusalem to Mecca. Thus this mosque uniquely contained two prayer niches (mihrabs). In 1987 the mosque was completely renovated, removing the old prayer niche that faced north, but maintaining the one facing Mecca. When the old mosque was torn down, the foundation stones of the earlier mosque revealed that the original building faced north towards both Petra and Jerusalem which were in almost exactly the same direction. Gibson believes that this is the origin of the claim that the first qibla faced Jerusalem.

However, this is not the only mosque with two qiblas. The Mosque of Fustat was built in 641 near Cairo. The original ground-plans of this mosque shows that the qibla pointed east towards Petra, and was corrected some years later. Gibson goes on to study over a dozen early Islamic mosques who's original qibla pointed to Petra, not Jerusalem.

In the last section of *Qur'anic Geography* Gibson presents a 32 page illustrated outline of Islamic History. Here he explains how the original qibla was changed from Petra to Mecca during Ibn Zubayr's rebellion in the Holy City. He also documents the destruction the Ka'ba and its subsequent rebuilding. Gibson then notes that it was just after this event that the mihrab mark or niche was introduced into mosque design. It is said that during the reign of the 'Uthman ibn Affan (644-656), the caliph ordered a sign to be posted on the wall of the mosques at Medina so that pilgrims could now easily identify

the direction in which to address their prayers. Gibson points out that this is a strange development since up until this time there was no question as to which direction the faithful should pray. The entire building always faced the qibla. Now, however, a sign was provided in the older mosques. This seems to indicate that a new qibla had been introduced.

Shortly after this the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina was renovated and the governor commanded that a niche be made to designate the new qibla. 'Uthman's sign was then placed inside this niche. Eventually, the niche came to be universally understood as identifying the qibla direction, and was adopted as a feature in other mosques. It is most interesting to notice that the mihrab niche was developed right after the time Gibson suggests the qibla changed. Evidently since there was confusion over which way to pray, older mosques began to adopt the mihrab niche so that the faithful could pray in the new direction.

Gibson tells us that a *Time of Confusion* began around 107 AH. During the next hundred years new mosque began to point in different directions. For instance, the mosques in the Hayr al-Gharbi and Hayr al-Sharqi palaces near Palmyra Syria both have qiblas that point between Petra and Mecca.

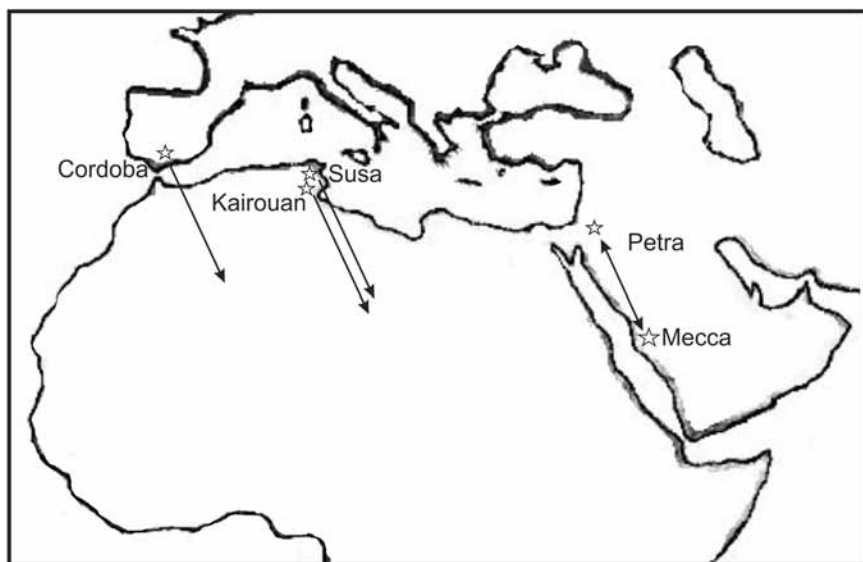
But the Mushatta Mosque built in Jordan just after this still faced Petra. The Mosque of al Mansur built a few years later in 754 AD clearly pointed to Mecca.

The mosques in North Africa and Spain built during this period are completely different. The foundation stones of the Ribat Fortress in Susa, Tunisia were laid in 770 AD, with a qibla that pointed south rather than towards Mecca or Petra. This was soon followed by the famous Great Mosque of Cordoba, in 784 AD which like the Susa mosque pointed to neither Mecca nor Petra but southward. Gibson suspects that since the Umayyad rulers in Spain were at odds with the new Abbasid rulers in Iraq, they refused to use the same qibla (Mecca), and yet felt that they could not point to the original Holy City as the Black Stone was no longer there. A few years later the Great Mosques of Kairouan and also the Great Mosque of Susa were constructed with qiblas also facing south.

These mosques in Spain and North Africa have long puzzled historians, but in order to understand them, Gibson claims we must consider what was taking place in the Middle East at this time. After 133 AH (750 AD) the Abbasids in Iraq defeated the Umayyads in Syria and established a new center of Islamic rule in the city of Baghdad. From this point on, all the Middle Eastern (Abbasid) mosques pointed to Mecca. In Spain and North Africa, the Umayyads continued to rule, and the Muslim world was split into two, with Abbasids

in the east, and Umayyads in the west. While the east was still struggling with civil unrest and open rebellions, the Umayyads in the west were experiencing a golden age with an expansion of learning, culture and architecture.

With the exception of a couple of mosques which were probably constructed on the foundations of previous mosques, all new Abbasid mosques faced Mecca from this point on, while the Umayyads in the west chose a different qibla. Gibson aptly points out the North African and Spanish mosques adopted a qibla that ran parallel to a line drawn between Petra and Mecca.



After presenting us with pages of archeological evidence that early mosques faced Petra, Gibson turns to ancient literary sources. He begins by pointing out early descriptions of Mecca which describe the city as having a high side and a low side, something unknown in Mecca today. He also points out that there are various references to two “thaniyas” or cracks in the rock through which the prophet would enter the city. He also notes that these early descriptions mention Mecca's city walls. Gibson aptly points out that Mecca today does not have thaniyas or city walls. Petra on the other hand was built in a valley. City walls crossed the valley to protect the city from attackers coming down the valley. The city of Petra had both a high and low side and also had two other entrances, both of them narrow cracks through the mountains. Today, tourists enter the city of Petra through the crack known as the siq. The other thaniya is on the far side of the colonnaded street and leads into the maze of canyons which eventually empty out into Wadi Araba.

Gibson then take us to an ancient book known as the Zumurrud. While

the text of this book has not survived to our times, we can surmise what was in it from the writings of various later scholars who quoted it and argued against it. The Zumurrud claims that Muhammad's night journey from the Holy City to Jerusalem was not a miracle because these two cities were close enough together so that a person could go from one to the other and back in one night. Muslim scholars have rejected the authenticity of the Zumurrud because of statements like this. However, if the original Holy City of Islam was in fact Petra, this description would have been absolutely correct. The distance from Petra to Jerusalem is only 100 miles. While it would be a strenuous trip on a horse, one could indeed travel from one to the other and back in one day. Years later when Muslim scholars had forgotten the city of Petra, the writings of the Zumurrud seemed totally absurd. Besides, by then Muhammad's overnight journey to Jerusalem was accepted as a miracle.

During his study of Islamic literature, Gibson noted that mention of the city of Petra was missing in all early Islamic literature. Since the Petra scrolls create an overwhelming picture of Petra as a viable city with a functioning hinterland throughout the sixth century, why is there no mention of Petra in any early Islamic literature? There are records of people passing through the region and armies marching through this area, but Petra is never mentioned. At the very same time, non-Islamic literature mentions Petra, but never Mecca. There is no mention of Mecca in any literature until 740 AD when it first appears in the *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica*.

If Petra was the first Islamic Holy City before the Black Stone was moved to Mecca, then would it not make sense that later editors would eliminate every mention of Petra? Is it possible that the descriptions of Petra were transferred to Mecca in Arabia, and thus every mention of Petra was removed from Islamic literature?

Qur'anic Geography also traces the origins of the Black Stone, demonstrating that such a stone was the focus of worship in ancient times. Maximus of Tyre speaks of it as does the Suda Lexicon, which places it in Petra, not Mecca.

Besides providing us with over a dozen literary proofs that point to Petra as being the Holy City of Mecca, Gibson also provides seventeen historical proofs. These include large stones that marked out the sacred area around the Holy city; present in Petra but missing in Mecca. The god Dushara is mentioned as being worshiped in Mecca, while Dushara was almost exclusively worshiped in Petra. Gibson also points to references of games of chance being played in the Holy City, and points to dozens of ancient game boards being found at Petra.

Gibson goes on to demonstrate that Petra is north of Medina and Mecca is to the south. He then points out that during the Battle for Medina, the Quraysh armies from Mecca always attacked Medina from the north, and during the Battle of the Trench, Medina was defended by a trench between two mountains on the north side of the city. Also, Muslim armies marching out of Medina to attack the Holy City always marched north from Medina towards Petra rather than to the south toward Mecca.

The movements of several people are then traced demonstrating that during the life of Muhammad only the city of Petra fits the description of their travels.

Early descriptions of the battle for Mecca raise many troubling points. The Muslim armies march north from Medina, attacking the Byzantine armies in southern Jordan. After their initial defeat they decide to attack the Holy City. Here the Muslim literature asks us to believe that the Muslim armies marched all the way down the Arabian Peninsula to attack Mecca before returning all the way to the north to again fight the Byzantine armies.

Gibson writes “*Consider the distances the armies had to march. Medina to Mu'ta (in Jordan) is about 900 kilometers, taking the most direct route. Mu'ta to Mecca is another 1,200 kilometers. Travel from Mecca to northern Arabia is another 1000 kilometers. In total this would be 3,100 kilometers across some of the most difficult terrain in the world: rugged mountains, burning deserts, and waterless plains.*” Using maps, Gibson demonstrates the awkwardness of these claims.

Gibson then tackles a troubling description of Mecca found in the writings of Al Tabari where the Muslim army quietly approaches the Holy City through a maze of canyons before attacking the walled gardens of Mecca. He then provides photos of the canyons south of Petra and describes a route that aptly fit this description.

As we mentioned *Qur'anic Geography* points out that Muslims believe that ancient Mecca was a major city on the caravan routes between the kingdoms of Arabia. However, history does not prove this to be so. One would think that kingdoms like those in Yemen, which are immediately south of present day Mecca, and those north of Mecca would substantiate Mecca's existence, but this is not the case as historians and archeologists can date many small kingdoms north and south of Mecca, but they cannot find any reference to the city of Mecca which supposedly existed in the region for thousands of years!

Gibson then examines the claims that Muslim army officers in Iraq decided to make a quick pilgrimage to the Holy City while their armies marched

to the next city. Traditional history has us believe that they traveled over 3000 kilometers to Mecca rather than 1500 kilometers to Petra and back. Since dates are provided for the journey, Gibson demonstrates that the men would not have had sufficient time to make the trip to present day Mecca, but Petra was within range if they directly crossed the desert. He then spends several pages describing how this journey would have taken place, and where the ancient water reservoirs were located in the desert to make it possible.

All of this evidence clearly points to Petra as being a more probably location of Islam's Holy City than Mecca. Gibson claims that Islamic history makes more sense if we read Petra instead of Mecca for all history prior to 700 AD.

III

So how did it happen that the qibla direction switched from Petra to Mecca at such a late date? *Qur'anic Geography* explains for us the second Islamic civil war: In 683 AD, 64 years after the founding of Islam, 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr declared himself caliph in the Holy City. This was in opposition to the Umayyad rulers in Damascus, who reacted strongly and sent an army against the Holy City. The Syrians fought against Ibn al-Zubayr and his companions in the Holy City until word reached them that the caliph in Damascus had died. Members of the Umayyad family who were with the army wanted to return to Damascus as well. Using the events that happened and the dates given to us, it is hard to imagine that these armies traveled from Mecca in Arabia back to arrive in Damascus only forty days after the caliph died.

Al Tabari tells us that Ibn al-Zubayr demolished the Ka'ba sanctuary until he had leveled it to the ground, and then he dug out its foundation. He then placed the Black Stone onto a wooden cradle in a strip of silk.

The following year (65 AH) Ibn Zubayr claimed he discovered the real foundation stones that Abraham laid. Gibson believes that this discovery was made at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Ibn Zubayr may have chosen a remote place in Arabia to distance himself from the Umayyad powers in Damascus and built a new Ka'ba sanctuary there. During this time the Umayyads in Damascus were involved with internal strife as several caliphs died, one after the other.

In 68 AH there were four distinct groups that went on pilgrimage, each under different banners because four factions were fighting in the civil war. If the stone was indeed moved, then this would explain why there were different pilgrimages to different locations. In 69 AH there was a revolt in Damascus itself, further diverting attention from the problems in the Holy City.

Gibson points out that Al Tabari provides us with several pages of history for each year during this period but when he comes to 70 AH all he tells us is that Ibn Zubayr purchased large numbers of horses, camels and baggage, leading Gibson to assume that some of Zubayr's people moved to Mecca where

they now placed the Black Stone in the new Ka'ba sanctuary.

In 71 AH there were further rebellions in parts of Arabia. The city of Kufa rebelled and joined Ibn Zubayr in promoting the new qibla. They tell Ibn Zubayr that they are now the people who turn to the same qibla as them.

In 73-74 AH the Syrian armies surrounded the Holy City of Petra and destroyed the inner part of the city using a trebuchet. In the city of Mecca there is no evidence of trebuchet stones ever being used against the city, or even city walls over which a trebuchet would have thrown stones. However, in Petra, archeologists have uncovered hundreds of trebuchet stones which were hurled into the central courtyard in front of the Temple of Dushara. Gibson claims that by using the fallen roof tiles from the nearby Great Temple, it is possible to date the fortified area and stones to sometime after the earthquake of 551 AD. The area was later covered in rubble from the earthquake of 713 AD. Gibson glibly asks us "*Is it not an amazing coincidence that a trebuchet was used against Petra at exactly the same time as the one mentioned by al-Tabari as being used against Mecca?*"

Sometime Around 82 AH the Umayyad court and mosque buildings in Amman were built facing Mecca. This is the earliest record of the new qibla being used in architecture. Strangely there are no recorded pilgrimages between 83 and 87 AH. It seems that the qibla direction was contested during this time, so that no one could agree on where the pilgrimage should go to. Should it go to the ruined buildings in Petra or to the new Ka'ba which housed the Black Stone in Arabia?

Around this time mosques started hanging a sign on the wall to indicate a new qibla direction. Gibson notes that this year the qibla wall was changed in the mosque in Medina, under the authority of the governor who said it must be changed even if people argued against it. Then in 89 AH the mihrab niche was instituted in new mosques to denote the new direction of prayer.

Gibson introduces us to the recorded earthquakes in the Middle East during this period and notes that in 94 AH an earthquake destroyed much of Petra and the city was abandoned. He believes that after this time Mecca in Arabia became the focal point of worship, deemed approved by God, due to the divine action seen in the earthquake. He notes that the new mosques in Umayyad Spain pointed their qibla in a line parallel to a line drawn between Petra and Mecca. Some years after this, in 122 AH the *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica* contains the first mention of Mecca. Then in 128 AH another earthquake destroyed buildings in Syria and Jordan, and Gibson claims that all hope of returning the Black Stone to the Holy City was lost.

Some years later in 132 AH the Abbasids began to rule from Iraq. Since the city of Kufa in Iraq had adopted the Mecca qibla very early on, all mosques after this time faced Mecca in Saudi Arabia and all Qur'ans written in the Kufic script contain verses in Sura 2 referring to the change of the qibla. Gibson returns to the issue of the qibla change being mentioned in Sura 2 at the end of his book when he provides a list of early Qur'ans and their contents. He points out that if the qibla did not change until 70 years after the Hijra, then it comes as no surprise that the very early Qur'ans did not include these verses.

IV

Qur'anic Geography has a very interesting chapter on early Islamic navigation which explains how distance was measured in pre-Islamic times and how the stars were used to find precise locations and directions, thus allowing Muslim architects to accurately determine the qibla direction.

This is followed by a study of how the Abbasid rulers may have reconstructed Islamic history. These rulers encouraged Islamic scholars to compile histories of what happened during the founding of Islam, some 200 years earlier. Gibson points out that these reconstructions were introduced into a literary vacuum.

For instance, he documents a letter from Caliph 'Umar to Amrou, the leader of the Muslim armies who had just taken Alexandria. Amrou asked the caliph what to do with the thousands of manuscripts that he found in warehouses in Egypt. The caliph replied:

“As for the books you mention, here is my reply. If their content is in accordance with the book of Allah, we may do without them, for in that case the book of Allah more than suffices. If, on the other hand, they contain matter not in accordance with the book of Allah, there can be no need to preserve them. Proceed then and destroy them.”

Gibson claims the remnants of the Great Library of Alexandria were then burned. He notes that another Muslim writer Ibn al-Qifti tells us that the books were distributed to the public baths of Alexandria where they were used to feed the stoves which kept the baths comfortably warm. Ibn al-Qifti writes that “the number of baths was well known but I have forgotten it. They say, that it took six months to burn all that mass of material.” Eutychius tells us that there were four thousand baths that received books from the Alexandrian library.

Another record of the exchange between the Muslim General Amrou and the Egyptian patriarch can be found in *Patrologia Orientalis*. A further Syriac manuscript also attests to this, and was published with commentary in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1915.

This burning of books, however, did not start in Egypt, but was begun in

Persia. When Caliph 'Umar's armies marched against the city of Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanian Empire in early January 637 AD the palaces and the Great Library at Ctesiphon were burned.

Another example of book burning can be seen when the Muslim invaders reached India some years later. This time the library of Nalanda, the most renowned repository of Buddhist knowledge in the world at the time with its collection of hundreds of thousands of volumes was set aflame and burned.

Even Christian churches were to suffer damage. The "Edict of Yazid," issued by the Umayyad caliph Yazid II in 722-723 AD ordered the destruction of all visible Christian images within the territory of the caliphate. In present-day Jordan there is ample archaeological evidence that church mosaics were removed or covered at this time. One can only surmise that the city of Petra is today bereft of all inscriptions because of the actions of zealous Muslims during Yazid's reign.

In the end, the only book to survive in Arabia was the Glorious Qur'an. However, even here historians have struggled. It seems that most of the Qur'an was retained in oral fashion rather than written form. While the Arabs were great memorizers and had the ability to retain the entirety of the Qur'an, the retention of materials in an oral tradition suffers from two difficulties. First, the accuracy of the memories of the individuals involved must be perfect. In the case of the Qur'an, arguments arose over various verses, how they should be rendered, and if they should or should not be included in the whole.

Second, the problem of transferring knowledge from the learned to the novice is often a difficult step. In the case of the Qur'an, most of the men who had memorized the sayings of Muhammad were also warriors. As is often the case, warriors die in battle, and their knowledge of the Qur'an perished with them. This is amply illustrated in the Battle of Yamama when an estimated 450 men who had memorized the Qur'an were killed.

Caliph 'Uthman compiled a written version of the Qur'an in his day and sent one copy to each Muslim province. He then commanded that all other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burned. This means that during the life of Caliph 'Umar, only five or six copies of the complete Qur'an existed in all of Arabia.

Thus the Abbasid writers had few if any documents to oppose them when they re-created Islamic history. Most of the Quraysh tribe who were knowledgeable about the early days had long since died, or now lived on the fringes of the empire. Any of the old Qur'ans in existence could be fully accepted, and the owners convinced that what they had was only a partial copy of the Qur'an. The Abbasids could publish "full" versions of the Qur'an that con-

tained all of the verses, including the new ones about the change of qibla. In this way, older versions of the Qur'an would still be revered, but the newer versions would have the added verses, such as Sura 2.143-145 which tells us that the qibla was changed during Muhammad's lifetime.

Gibson then chooses four Abbasid writers to demonstrate what happened during this period. First is Ibn Hisham who begins the practice of editing past writings. He edits the earlier work known as: *Sirat Rasul Allah* (The Life of Muhammad) correcting *grievous errors* and making the book more politically correct for his day.

Following Hisham, Bukhari began collecting traditions and sayings of Muhammad that he thought were trustworthy. All together he collected over 300,000 accounts but he only included 2,602 in his book, discarding the rest as not trustworthy. Around the same time, other Muslim scholars also recognized the complete literary vacuum surrounding the beginnings of Islam, and they gathered and vetted what people said about Muhammad. Thus, much of our record of early Islam was edited by the later Muslim writers who gathered these saying and traditions (hadiths).

This was followed by Al Tabari, a Muslim historian who lived from 839 to 923 AD. Al Tabari wrote Islamic history according to the hadiths and traditions that had come down to him. Years later Yaqut compiled a geography of Islam as there was confusion over the location of various places. Writing many hundred years after the founding of Islam, he tried to interpret the ancient locations according to the sayings and traditions of his day.

From these four representative writers (many more are mentioned in appendices A and B of *Qur'anic Geography*) we can see that these historians wrote many years after the events they described, interpreting them according to the politically correct views of their day.

But, you might argue, wouldn't someone object? While there were objections, one must remember that the Abbasids based their rule on the authority of being connected to members of Muhammad's family. Second, the Quraysh tribe was disbanded to the far reaches of the empire. Many of those in Arabia had been killed in the rebellions. Added to this, in Baghdad there were many Islamic scholars who supported the "new" Qur'an and the Meccan location. Who was to argue? The Abbasids seemed to encourage not only the study of religion but the study of all knowledge. In the years that followed, scores of scholars emerged and Baghdad became a world-renowned center of learning.

However, there was one group in Arabia, closer to Mecca who taught that the pilgrimage to Mecca was all wrong. They rebelled and took control

of Bahrain's capital Hajar, and also al-Hasa which became the capital of their new Qarmatian State. These Qarmatians tried to stop Muslims from going to Mecca for the pilgrimage. They so vehemently opposed pilgrimages to Mecca that eventually they began ambushing caravans and massacring pilgrims. Then in 929 AD they sacked Mecca, desecrated the Well of Zamzam with corpses of pilgrims, and removed the Black Stone. With the Black Stone in captivity the pilgrimages halted, and Islam was in crisis. However in 952 AD the Abbasids agreed to pay a huge sum for the return of the Black Stone. When they received it back, it had been broken into several pieces.

After a defeat at the hands of the Abbasids in 976 the Qarmatians focused on internal issues and slowly their status was reduced to that of a local power.

Gibson admits that his research has some problems. Since many of the manuscripts were adjusted to be "politically correct" he has the problem of trying to determine what the texts might have originally contained. In effect, he had to read back into the text to discover places where the editors neglected to make changes. For instance, if the original direction of prayer was towards Petra but was later moved to Mecca in the south of Arabia, the later writers and editors had to find ways of editing earlier manuscripts to remove all the references to Petra and make them all refer to Mecca. One example of this was the introduction of Jerusalem as the direction of the earlier qibla. This idea is found mostly in later writings after Abbasid writers began to do their work, and never in the early writings. Even the term 'Al-Aqsa was later applied to Jerusalem to give it some credit as the earlier focus of the qibla. So researchers today have the difficult job of trying to read into texts what they originally contained before later editors tried to 'improve' them according to what was politically or religiously correct at the time.

For example, Gibson points to a problem in Bukhari's writings where he says the first qibla was towards Sham, the Arab name for Damascus, which means "north" but a few lines later says the first qibla was towards Jerusalem. A few pages later Bukhari clearly identifies Damascus as being "Sham."

Gibson believes that the first qibla pointed towards Petra, and that this was called "Syria" by most Arabs, because Petra was a city in the Roman province of Syria. It would be similar to saying one prayed towards Ontario in one sentence and then towards Toronto in another. In this case either Bukhari or perhaps a later unnamed editor inserted Jerusalem into the text, but failed to change the earlier reference to Sham (Damascus).

Gibson concludes his book this way: *One of the main arguments against the Holy City of Islam being in Petra in northern Arabia and then changed to southern Arabian during the closing years of the Umayyad Dynasty is that the Qur'an*

indicates that this change took place during Muhammad's lifetime. These verses are in Sura 2:142-147. Note that the Qur'an does not say where the previous qibla pointed to, it only tells us that the qibla was changed towards the Sacred Mosque. It also admits that the change of the qibla was momentous to all except those guided by Allah.

If the Qur'an is the exact word of Allah and a duplicate of the original one is in heaven, then it cannot be changed or corrected. All Muslims everywhere understand from these verses that the qibla was changed during Muhammad's life time. Islamic scholars several hundred years after Muhammad's death inform us that the original qibla pointed to Jerusalem. They insist that when Muhammad received the revelation of Sura 2 that he stood in the Medina mosque, and turned, and faced south instead of north (towards Syria). The Qur'an however, gives us no clue as to the direction of the old qibla, or even of the new qibla, except that it is towards the sacred mosque. ...

... Al Muwatta 14:7 states: Yahya related to me from Malik from Yahya ibn Sa'id that Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab said, "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, prayed towards the Bayt al-Maqdis for sixteen months after arriving in Medina. Then the qibla was moved, two months before the battle of Badr."

All of this stands in contrast to the archeological, historical and literary evidence that indicates the qibla changed seventy years after the Hijra, and that this change was gradually accepted over the next one hundred years. There are also strong indicators that later writers tampered with sacred texts and constructed new histories that supported their theories. What really happened twelve hundred years ago in Arabia? When comparing the geography presented to us by the Abbasid writers with archeological evidence as well as literary and historical records, something doesn't match up.

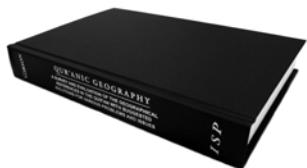
The only conclusion I come to is that Islam was founded in northern Arabia in the city of Petra. It was there that the first parts of the Qur'an were revealed before the faithful were forced to flee to Medina. Thus, the prophet Muhammad never visited Mecca, nor did any of the first four rightly guided caliphs. Mecca was never a centre of worship in ancient times, and was not part of the ancient trade routes in Arabia. All down through history the Arabs made pilgrimages to the holy sites in the city of Petra, which had many ancient temples and churches. It was in Petra that 350 idols were retrieved from the rubble after an earthquake and set up in a central courtyard. It was in Petra that Muhammad directed the destruction of all the idols except one, the Black Stone. This stone remained in the Ka'ba in Petra until it was later taken by the followers of Ibn al-Zubayr deep into Arabia to the village of Mecca for safe keeping from the Umayyad armies. And today it is to this

stone that Muslims face, rather than to their holy city and the qibla that Muhammad gave them.

I see no other way of interpreting the facts I discovered, be they archeological, historical, or literary. But these are my personal conclusions. I am open to learning more, and discovering what really took place in ancient Arabia.

If you want to study this subject further, please purchase a copy of ***Qur'anic Geography***, as it is complete with references, footnotes, photos, charts, satellite images, time lines, bibliographies, and more. It will be interesting to see the responses from western as well as Islamic scholars as they study and seek to answer the material presented in Gibson's book.

Qur'anic Geography



A survey and evaluation of the geographical references in the Qur'an with suggested solutions for various problems and issues.

Hardcover, 2011, Dan Gibson ISBN: 978-0-9733642-8-6

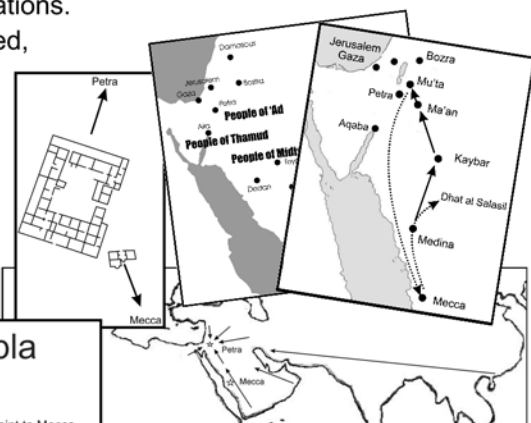
Dan Gibson believes that four times in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, the Arabs united and burst forth from the deserts conquering other nations. The first is described in the Qur'an as the people of 'Ad. The Bible describes these as an alliance of tribes led by the Edomites, living in the land of 'Uz. The Egyptians described them as Hyksos, or shepherd kings who invaded Egypt. By combining these three identities together, Gibson sees evidence of this powerful alliance from archeological remains in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen and Oman. In the end the Egyptians crush the alliance and the remaining tribes disperse and become small, isolated tribes in the desert.

Eventually Arabia unites again, this time under the leadership of the Midianites. The Qur'anic and the Biblical records clearly remember when the tribes united under Midianite leadership and challenged the nations outside of the peninsula. This time they meet their defeat in the Levant.

Many centuries later, the tribes of Ishmael take leadership, this time under the direction of the Nabataean tribe, descendants of the eldest son of Ishmael. This empire would be different, for the backbone of this empire was trade not military force. The Qur'an calls them the people of Thamud, meaning "after 'Ud". The Jews called them Nabataeans, and the Romans simply refer to them as Arabs. In 106 AD the northern part of their kingdom was absorbed into the Roman Empire and eventually they faded from view.

It was not until 600 AD that the Arabian Peninsula was again united, this time under the flag of Islam. Once again the tribes of Arabia burst from the deserts challenging the surrounding nations.

This time they will not be easily defeated, and their armies march to China in the east, Spain in the west, and Vienna in the north. Over....



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The Changing of the Qibla

100% point to Petra
(of those mosques we could determine)

12 % point to Petra
50 % point to Mecca
38 % point parallel

100 % point to Mecca

Petra

1 AH - 107 AH
622 AD - 725 AD

Confusion

107 AH - 207 AH
725 AD - 822 AD

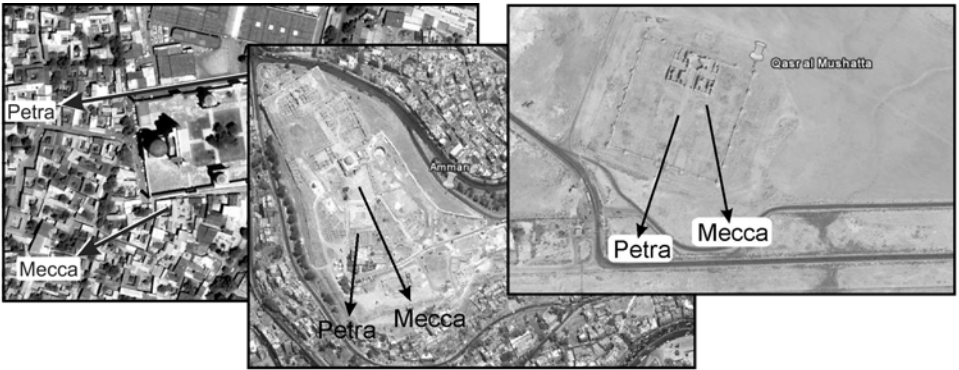
Mecca

207 AH - Present
822AD - Present

2nd Civil War

Abbasid rule begins

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But there is more to this book than a study of the four times when the Arabs demonstrated their greatness. This book also examines the geographical references in the Qur'an cross-referencing them with historical locations. The surprise comes when Gibson examines the Holy City of Islam, known as Mecca. Here Gibson finds evidence that the original Holy City was in northern Arabia in the city of Petra. He theorizes that during an Islamic civil war one hundred years after Muhammad, the Ka'ba was destroyed and the Black Rock was moved to its present location. Gibson examines archaeological, historical and literary evidence that support this theory and addresses many questions and objections that readers may have.

This book contains many references, as well as some useful appendices including a 32 page time line of Islamic history from 550 AD - 1095 AD, and a 20 page annotated selected bibliography of early Islamic sources in chronological order from 724 AD - 1100AD plus a list of many early Qur'anic manuscripts. Over 470 pages, with index.

Adam
 Noah
 Shem
 Kahtan
 Yemeni Tribes
 Aljman Tribes
 Harasis Tribes
 Jandaia Tribes
 Kathr Tribes
 (Rashid & Bak Kathir)
 Al-Murrah Tribes
 Shammur Tribes
 Nejd Tribes
 Aberham
 Ishmael
 12 sons of Ishmael
 Anaza Tribes
 Ruwala Tribes
 Feedan Tribes
 Sma' Tribes
 Bani Sakhr Tribes
 Muzaynah Tribes

Citadel complex
 southern of collapse
 gate here?
 additional structures
 & tents may have
 been in this area
 stone foundation
 stepped by brush
 "stone" gate here?

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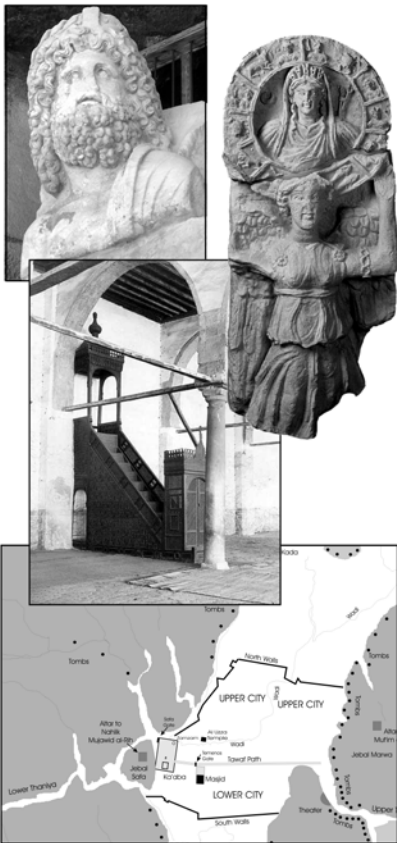
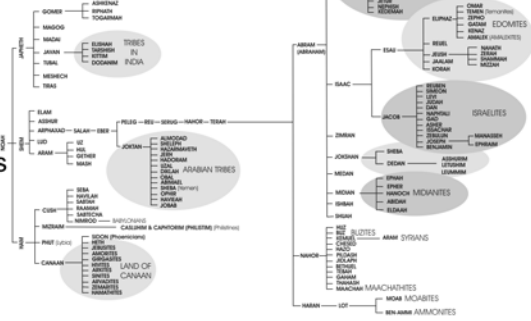
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