

Identifying the Qur'ānic Milieu

("Where Was the Koran Written?")

J. Little



According to traditional Muslim historiography, the Arab prophet Muḥammad—a member of the Qureshite tribe (*banū-Qurayṣ*)—grew up in the pagan-populated south-Hijazian town of Mecca, where he spent the first ten years of his prophetic career trying to convert his kinsmen to monotheism. In the year 622, Muḥammad and his small band of followers fled from the antagonism of the Qureshites and emigrated (*hijra*) to the pagan and Jewish town of Medina further north in central Hijaz, where Muḥammad spent the rest of his life. Over the course of his career in pagan-dominated Mecca and Jewish-inhabited Medina, Muḥammad expounded his monotheistic message via a polemical recitation (*qur'ān*), variously addressed to his pagan, Jewish, and palæo-Muslim audiences.

If Muḥammad was indeed the Quran-author and really lived in the south-Hijazian town of Mecca (as per later Muslim historiography),* one would naturally expect his *qur'ān* to reflect a south-Hijazian environment; as is the case with most literature, the content of a text usually reflects in some way the milieu of the author. Yet surprising, the Quran seemingly does not reflect a south-Hijazian context or origin; instead, the geographical, historical, and cultural allusions within the Quran overwhelmingly point to a distinctly northwest-Arabian milieu, on the outskirts of Syria-Palestine and the Mediterranean.[1] This remarkable insight into the context of the Quran is rendered all the more significant by modern critical scholarship, which has irrevocably undermined the historical reliability of Muslim historiography.[2] In other words: if we ignore the accumulated juridical, theological, political, and romantic sediment of later Muslim tradition—divorced as it was by several centuries from the original milieu of the Quran and palæo-Islam—and instead rely upon the Quran itself to ascertain the cultural, historical, and geographical context which produced it, a very different picture emerges: overwhelmingly, the evidence seems to suggest that the Quran originated in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, on the outskirts of Syria-Palestine – in a region known as *Arabia Petræa* during Antiquity.

Judæo-Christian Arabian Audience

The Quran purports to be a God-given scripture following the Judæo-Christian religious tradition, akin to the Torah (*Tawrāt*), Psalms (*Zabūr*), and Gospels (*Injīl*) that preceded it.[3] It comes as no surprise therefore that the sacred-history (*heilsgeschichte*) promulgated by the Quran-author overwhelmingly focuses upon Judæo-Christian narratives, including materials derived from Jewish midrashim and Christian apocrypha. This emphasis is exemplified in the number of times the Quran-author mentioned the names of Biblical prophets and other notable figures from the Bible:

Moses (*Mūsā*) is named 136 times.[4]
Pharaoh (*Fir'awn*) is named 74 times.[4]
Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*) is named 69 times.[6]
Noah (*Nūh*) is named 43 times.[7]
Mary (*Maryam*) is named 34 times.[8]
Adam (*Ādam*) is named 25 times.[9]
Joseph (*Yūsuf*) is named 27 times.[10]
Lot (*Lūṭ*) is named 27 times.[11]
Jesus (*'Īsā*) is named 25 times.[12]
Aaron (*Hārūn*) is named 20 times.[13]
Isaac (*Ishāq*) is named 17 times.[14]
Solomon (*Sulaymān*) is named 17 times.[15]
David (*Dāwūd*) is named 16 times.[16]
Jacob (*Ya'qūb*) is named 16 times.[17]
Ishmael (*Ismā'īl*) is named 12 times.[18]
Messiah (*Masīh*) is named 11 times.[19]
The Devil (*Iblīs*) is named 11 times.[20]
Zechariah (*Zakariyyā'*) is named 7 times.[21]
Haman (*Hāmān*) is named 6 times.[22]
The Apostles (*Hawāriyyūn*) are named 5 times.[23]
John (*Yaḥyā*) is named 5 times.[24]
Job (*Aiyūb*) is named 4 times.[25]
Jonah (*Yūnus*) is named 4 times.[26]
Korah (*Qārūn*) is named 4 times.[27]
Amram (*'Imrān*) is named 3 times.[28]
Elijah (*Ilyās*) is named 3 times.[29]
Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) is named 3 times.[30]
Goliath (*Jālūt*) is named 3 times.[31]
Saul (*Ṭālūt*) is named 2 times.[32]
Elisha (*Alīsa'*) is named 2 times.[33]
Enoch (*Idrīs*) is named 2 times.[34]
Eleazar (*Āzar*) is named 1 time.[35]
Ezra (*'Uzayr*) is named 1 time.[36]
Michael (*Mīkāil*) is named 1 time.[37]

The Jewish influences and allusions within the Quran could perhaps be partially-accounted for by Muḥammad's politico-religious career in the central-Hijazian town of Medina,[38] but the heavy Christian influences remain a problem: there is no substantial indication of a significant Christian presence in Medina,[39] let alone the south-Hijazian Mecca of Muslim legend (which was allegedly a pagan stronghold).[40] The Quran does not appear to reflect this south-Hijazian pagan-Arab milieu alleged by later Muslim historiography – the pagan influences and allusions within the Quran are minimal at best, with only a few scattered references to polytheistic deities and idols.[41] Instead, the referential manner of the Quran towards Biblical and apocryphal narratives presupposes an Arabic-speaking audience immersed in Judæo-Christian tradition.[42] Moreover, most of the Christian materials within the Quran were palpably derived from the Syro-Aramaic tradition of Christianity,[43] which would seem to indicate a close proximity to the Fertile Crescent. Alternatively, Syriac Christianity was also prevalent throughout eastern Arabia during Late Antiquity,[44] which could indicate a Quranic context within the Arab-Christian communities of Iraq, Bahrein, or Oman. According to Arthur Jeffery, however, the Syriac-derived vocabulary and terminology within the Quran often “approximate most closely to those found in the Christian-Palestinian dialect.”[45] Consequently, it seems plausible that the Quran reflects a milieu identifiable in northwestern Arabia or outskirts of Syria-Palestine, were Syriac-influenced Arabic-speaking communities of Christians predominated.[46]

Evidence for the existence of a Late-Antique Judæo-Christian culture in northwestern Arabia can be found in the writings of the Palestinian-Christian chronicler Sozomen, who recorded the following concerning the Arabs (“Saracens” and “Ishmaelites”) during the 5th Century:

This is the tribe which took its origin and had its name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham; and the ancients called them Ishmaelites after their progenitor. As their mother Hagar was a slave, they afterwards, to conceal the opprobrium of their origin, assumed the name of Saracens, as if they were descended from Sara, the wife of Abraham. Such being their origin, they practice circumcision like the Jews, refrain from the use of pork, and observe many other Jewish rites and customs. If, indeed, they deviate in any respect from the observances of that nation, it must be ascribed to the lapse of time, and to their intercourse with the neighboring nations. Moses, who lived many centuries after Abraham, only legislated for those whom he led out of Egypt. The inhabitants of the neighboring countries, being strongly addicted to superstition, probably soon corrupted the laws imposed upon them by their forefather Ishmael. The ancient Hebrews had their community life under this law only, using therefore unwritten customs, before the Mosaic legislation. These people certainly served the same gods as the neighboring nations, honoring and naming them similarly, so that by this likeness with their forefathers in religion, there is evidenced their departure from the laws of their forefathers. As is usual, in the lapse of time, their ancient customs fell into oblivion, and other practices gradually got the precedence among them. Some of their tribe afterwards happening to come in contact with the Jews, gathered from them the facts of their true origin, returned to their kinsmen, and inclined to the Hebrew customs and laws. From that time on, until now, many of them regulate their lives according to the Jewish precepts. Some of the Saracens were converted to Christianity not long before the present reign. They shared in the faith of Christ by intercourse with the priests and monks who dwelt near them, and practiced philosophy in the neighboring deserts, and who were distinguished by the excellence of their life, and by their miraculous works. It is said that a whole tribe, and Zocomus, their chief, were converted to Christianity and baptized about this period...[47]

The epigraphic record also contains “dozens of religious inscriptions from Arabia and the Negev in the pre- and early Islamic period that focus on Abraham alone and on a religion centred on him,”[48] evidencing the existence of some kind of *Abrahamism* in Late Antique northwestern Arabia and southern Palestine. The archæologist Yehuda Nevo summarised the Negev material in particular as follows:

The evidence amassed so far indicates that a basic form of monotheism and an emphasis on Abraham existed, together with paganism and Christianity, in the Negev for several centuries before Islam.[49]

This is especially relevant given that, in addition to retelling Judæo-Christian traditions, the Quran explicitly exhorts its audience to adhere to the ‘religion of Abraham’ (*millat Ibrāhīm*).[50]

In short, the literary and epigraphic evidence clearly indicates the appearance of an Abraham-emphasising Judæo-Christian culture in northwestern Arabia during the 5th and 6th centuries, providing a plausible context from which Muḥammad and the Quran may have emerged during the 7th Century.

The Two Seas

The Quran refers several times to “the two seas” (*al-baḥrayn*), an ambiguous term[51] that appears 5 times throughout the text.[52] These dual seas are said to be separated by a barrier (*barzaḳ* and *hājiz*),[53] preventing comingling between the two;[54] one is described as sweet (*furāt*) and drinkable, whilst the other is salty (*milḥ*) and bitter.[55] According to the Quran, its audience takes fish (*laḥm ṭarīy*, literally “fresh meat”)[56] and pearls (*lu’lu’*)[57] from both of these seas, which contain coral (*marjān*)[58] and are seen to be plied by ships (*fulk* and *jawārī*).[59]

It seems likely that the dual seas mentioned in the Quran refer to two of the several bodies of water that bound the southern Levant, such as the Red Sea (which contains coral reefs[60] and an ancient pearling industry[61]), the Mediterranean Sea, the freshwater Sea of Galilee, and the hyper-saline Dead Sea. The Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea are separated by the barrier of the Sinai, whilst both are separated from the inland lakes—which are also separated from each other—by the barrier of terrestrial Palestine. The candidacy of this region as the place of the two seas is perhaps further strengthened by another passage in the Quran, which claims that Moses sought to travel to the juncture between two bodies of water (*majma‘ al-baḥrayn*).[62] Given the traditional Mosaic connection to the Sinai and Palestine, and the geographical nexus of the southern Levant between several bodies of water, it seems highly possible that the *baḥrayn* referred to in the Quran can be found in this region.[63] If true, this would suggest an immediate proximity to this region for the author and audience of the Quran.



The Sinai from Space

Regardless of the identity of these Two Seas, however, a salient point remains: the audience of the Quran were assumed by the author to be mariners and fishermen (as well as agriculturalists and farmers), who commonly utilised the products of the seas in their diet and fashion.[64]

Mediterranean Agriculture

The Quran makes numerous references to agriculture,[65] variously and often copiously alluding to harvest,[66] lentils,[67] vines and grapes,[68] herbs,[69] cows,[70] onions,[71] sheep,[72] garlic,[73] grain,[74] gardens,[75] tillage,[76] cattle and flocks,[77] cucumbers,[78] pomegranates,[79] dates,[80] figs,[81] fruit,[82] sowing and planting,[83] olives and olive-trees,[84] etc. More specifically, the Quran clearly indicates that the hostile contemporaneous audience to the text—castigated as so-called ‘associators’ (*mušrikūn*) and ‘ingrates’ (*kuffār*)—was predominantly an agriculturalist society of farmers. The Quran-author presupposes an audience intimately familiar with farming and horticulture by making frequent agricultural allusions, and explicitly refers to their agricultural practices and customs;[85] as Patricia Crone put it: “The archetypal *mushrik* is an agriculturalist.”[86] Crone further noted that within the Quran, the author “is addressing himself to people whose livelihoods were in their gardens and fields, and he is doing so with a wealth of local detail showing that he is at home in this milieu himself.”[87] This vibrant agricultural environment described within the Quran clearly does not reflect the arid conditions of southern Hijaz, past or present[88] – instead, a more arable region is routinely the assumed milieu within the text:

Both the infidels and the believers have fields, gardens and cattle; both harvest grain, olives and pomegranates, but they have different views on how God wishes the harvest to be handled.[89]

Even if the date-palm orchards traditionally associated with the Jewish settlements of the Medina oasis[90] are taken into account, the Quranic chapters traditionally regarded to be early or ‘Meccan’ still presuppose an intensely-agricultural environment.[91] Similarly, if the south-Hijazian oasis of Ta'if—located near to the modern Mecca—is sought to account for these agricultural allusions, the problem of grain[92] and olives[93] still remains – neither of these crops appear to predate the reign of Mu'āwiya in the region, and both instead strongly indicate a Mediterranean environment, as noted by Crone:[94]

The suspicion that the location is doctrinally inspired is reinforced by the fact that the Qur'an describes the polytheist opponents as agriculturalists who cultivated wheat, grapes, olives, and date palms. Wheat, grapes and olives are the three staples of the Mediterranean; date palms take us southwards, but Mecca was not suitable for any kind of agriculture, and one could not possibly have produced olives there.[95]

Overall, the saliently-Mediterranean agricultural environment assumed by the Quran to be normative suggests that the Arab author and Arab audience of the text lived within a geographic nexus between the Mediterranean Sea and Arabia – in other words, Syria-Palestine and Arabia Petraea.



Syrian olive-grove

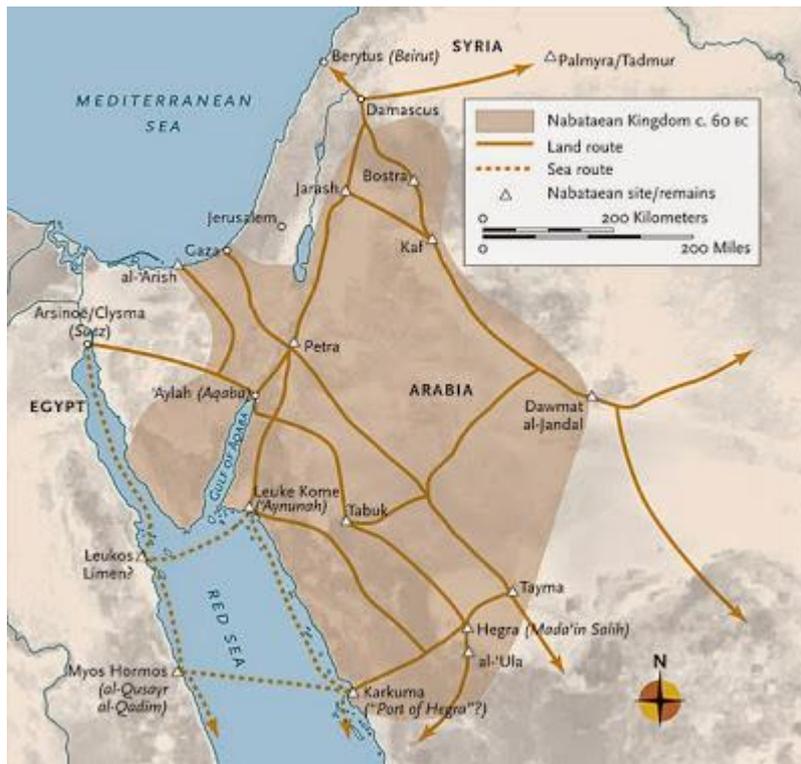
This Arab-agriculturalist milieu reflected within the Quran has an ancient precedent in northwestern Arabia: during the 1st Century CE, the Nabataean-Arab Kingdom transformed their domain stretching from the southern Levant to northern Hijaz, irrigating and cultivating the arid land:

Irrigation was obviously the prerequisite for settlements of this kind, and traces of a sophisticated system of reserving rain and water and channeling it in terraces to the cultivable fields probably go back to the age of Aretas.[96]

Even the barren Negev Desert of southern Palestine was subject to “increased use of irrigation” and “the development of terraced agriculture” during this era, as the Nabataean capital was transferred from Petra to Bostra.[97] This phenomenon of Levantine-Arab agriculture continued in subsequent centuries – from the 300s onwards, the Syrian region of Ḥawrān was—according to the research of François Villeneuve—a “countryside of villages,” where “agriculture was based on grain and vine cultivation, with cattle herding.”[98] This was similarly the case during the early 7th Century, throughout outer Syria-Palestine more generally:

Recent research shows that there were plenty of small villages or farms well beyond the Romano-Byzantine frontier in what are now Syria and Jordan.[99]

It seems probable that some memory of this lingering Levantine-Arab agricultural legacy was recorded in later Muslim historiography – according to poetry attributed to the Arab poet Ḥassān ibn-Ṭābit (d. c. 659), the Ghassanid Dynasty that ruled over outer Syria-Palestine and northwestern Arabia until the 7th Century allegedly “engaged in some agriculture, including animal management”; according to Irfan Shahid, one poem “speaks of the meadows of the Ghassānids where cattle and goats grazed”, whilst another seems to indicate “that the Ghassānids planted vines and other crops.”[100]



Nabataean culture

Consequently, the Mediterranean-proximate Arab-agriculturalist environment reflected within the Quran isn't without historical basis or precedent – instead, it seems evident that Late Antiquity witnessed a succession of Arab farming kingdoms and societies, situated on the Levantine fringe of northwestern Arabia.

The Past Nations of Arabia

The Quran frequently cites past nations and extinct civilisations (*umam k̄aliya*) to emphasise moral lessons to its contemporaneous audience, often drawing upon Biblical themes and antecedents;[101] although some of these references are ambiguous and largely devoid of useful historical information—such as the allusions to the Well People (*aṣḥāb ar-rass*),[102] the City People (*aṣḥāb al-qarya*),[103] the Trench People (*aṣḥāb al-ukūd*),[104] the Elephant People (*aṣḥāb al-fil*),[105] and the Tubba's People (*qawm tubba'*)[106]—others can be identified and verified. Whilst Biblical narratives dominate the historiography expounded by the Quran, the author—evidently an Arab, given his continual emphasis upon the Arabic language[107]—occasionally touches upon the history of the Arabs and the Arabian Peninsula. It is therefore significant that most of the identifiable ancient Arabian civilisations cited in the Quran were located in northwestern Arabia; although not necessarily implying a local (northwestern) provenance for the Arabic-speaking author of the text, this fact nevertheless strengthens the proposition that the Quran-author was indigenous to northwestern Arabia, hence his familiarity with and references to the history of the region.[108] There are five identifiable Arabian nations and civilisations mentioned in the Quran: The people of Midian (*Madyan*), the people of Thamud (*Ṭamūd*), the people of Aad (*'Ād*), the people of the tanglewood, and the people of Sheba (*Saba'*).



madā'in Šāliḥ

The nation of Midian is probably the easiest to identify, being well-attested in the archaeological and historiographical record and even the Bible; this ancient civilisation was located in northwestern Arabia, and appears to have been a powerful military and trading presence in the region.[109]

The nation of Thamud is also easy to identify in northwestern Arabia, being attested in ancient Assyrian, Greek, and Roman sources;[110] the Thamudian city of Hagra (*al-Hijr*)—a city carved out of stone, as noted by the Quran—was known to the Greeks as Hegra,[111] and Thamudian warriors even served in the Roman army during the 5th Century CE.[112]

The historical Arabian nation of Aad is less-salient. Despite being traditionally located in southern Arabia by later Muslim sources,[113] Aad appears instead to have been situated in the northwest of the Peninsula, where the Nabatæan ruin 'R-M has been identified as the Aadite city of 'Iram mentioned in the Quran. This association is further strengthened by the records of the 2nd Century Græco-Roman geographer Ptolemy (d. 168 CE), who mentioned a northwest-Arabian nation called the *Oadites* (i.e., Aadites) whose capital was a city called *Aramaua* (i.e., 'Iram).[114]

The Tanglewood People (*aṣḥāb al-ayka*) are the most difficult of the past Arabian nations to identify, given the ambiguity of the Quranic references to them;[115] Muslim historiography contains at least five different theories as to their identity, and even the name itself is contested (with some Quran-variations calling them *layka* instead of *ayka*).[116] Despite this confusion, modern scholarship has been able to shed some light on the Tanglewood People, a name which probably refers to the adherents of the Arabian vegetation-god Dusares (*dū aš-Šarā*); the cult of this floral deity was widespread in ancient Syria-Palestine and northwestern Arabia, as can be seen in Nabatæan, Thamudic, and Safaitic inscriptions from the region.[117] This connection to northwestern Arabia is further strengthened by the Quranic assertion that the Midianite prophet Šu'ayb[118] was also sent to the Tanglewood People,[119] indicating a probable regional proximity or association between them and Midian (in the mind of the Quran-author and his audience, at least).[120] Consequently, it seems highly probable that the term "Tanglewood People" (*aṣḥāb al-ayka*) denotes the followers of Dusares in northwestern Arabia.



Dusares

The only clear exception to this northwest-Arabian pattern is the Quranic reference to Sheba, an ancient Yemenite nation that is also mentioned in the Bible. Like the Bible,[121] the Quran tells of the meeting between King Solomon of Israel and the Queen of Sheba, although the Quranic narrative diverges somewhat from its Biblical counterpart and concludes with the Queen's conversion to monotheism.[122] The Quran also claims (in another chapter) that the people of Sheba—also known as the Sabæans[123]—became ungodly and were punished by God with a disastrous flood caused by a dam breakage (*sayl al-'arim*), which blighted their gardens and crops.[124] Although much of the Quranic narrative surrounding Sheba is legendary,[125] there is some historical information therein; the cataclysmic flood-event mentioned in the text is based upon the disastrous breakage of the Marib Dam (*sudd Mārib*) in southern Arabia, which devastated the surrounding region during the early 7th Century CE.[126] Marib was once the Sabæan capital during Antiquity, where Sabæan inscriptions occasionally mention “Marib and its two valleys” – this feature of Marib is recalled in the Quran, which mentions “the two gardens” of Sheba (which were ruined by the flooding of the dam).[127]



Yet despite the mention of Yemenite Sheba, the Quran-author's historiography of the Arabs and Arabia overwhelmingly focuses upon the former nations (*umam k̄aliya*) of the northwest: Midian is cited 10 times throughout the Quran in 7 separate chapters,[128] including mention of their flocks[129] and commerce;[130] Aad is cited 24 times throughout the Quran in 18 separate chapters,[131] including allusions to their prosperity and descriptions of their pillared city (*'Iram dāt al-'imād*) and sandy environment (*al-aḥqāf*);[132] and Thamud is cited 26 times throughout the Quran in 21 separate chapters,[133] including descriptions of their city Hijaḥ[134] and their rock-hewn architecture.[135] By comparison, Sheba is mentioned only twice within the entire Quran.[136] Even if the two fleeting and ambiguous Quranic references to the Tubba's People (*qawm tubba'*) are taken as an allusion to a south-Arabian nation or civilisation (as per Muslim historiography[137]), this still leaves the Quran with only four references to the history of southern Arabia; by stark contrast, the historical nations and civilisations of northwestern Arabia boast six-dozen citations throughout the Quran, suggesting the importance or relevance of this region to the Arab author of the text.

These past Arabian nations are of particular importance given the Quran-author's assertion to his contemporaneous audience (Q. 46:27)—in the allegedly-Meccan *sūrat al-Aḥqāf*[138]—that God has destroyed the cities around them; nearly all of the significant extinct and ruined civilisations mentioned in the Quran were located in northwestern Arabia, a fact which strongly indicates that the Quran-author and his Arabian audience hailed from this region. As Crone and Cook put it: "All of the significant *umam khāliya* of the Arabian past are to be sought here: Midian, Thamūd and 'Ād. And note how the Prophet tells his contemporaries that God has destroyed cities around them." [139] Hence, it seems probable that the Quran-author was indigenous to northwestern Arabia, which accounts for his emphasis upon this region's history over any other region in Arabia, and also for his reference to the immediate proximity of ancient ruins to his audience.[140]

Lotite Remnants

In recounting the story of Lot and his family, the Quran (37:133-138)—in the allegedly-Meccan *sūrat aṣ-Ṣāffāt*[141]—states that Lot's wife and the rest of Sodom were destroyed by the wrath of God, and in doing so mentions that its listeners are well-acquainted with the ruins of Sodom; according to the text, the Quranic audience regularly passes by the remnants of the people of Lot, in the morning and at night. This allusion to the intimate familiarity of the ruins of Sodom suggests a close environmental proximity to the Jordanian region of al-Balqā' and the Dead Sea, where Sodom was traditionally located.[142] As Crone wryly put it, "God himself was of the opinion that the Meccans would pass by the petrified remains of Lot's people in southern Palestine "in the morning and in the evening." One would not have guessed from this remark that the Meccans had to travel some eight hundred miles to see the remains in question." [143] Crone further elaborated on a subsequent occasion:

The prophet frequently tells his opponents to consider their significance and on one occasion remarks, with reference to the remains of Lot's people, that "you pass by them in the morning and in the evening". This takes us to somewhere in the Dead Sea region. Respect for the traditional account has prevailed to such an extent among modern historians that the first two points have passed unnoticed until quite recently, while the third has been ignored. The exegetes said that the Quraysh passed by Lot's remains on their annual journeys to Syria, but the only way in which one can pass by a place in the morning and the evening is evidently by living somewhere in the vicinity.[144]

In other words, the Quran strongly suggests that the author of the text and his contemporaneous audience—supposedly the Qureshites of Mecca—were situated in northwestern Arabia (near the ruins of Sodom), not southern Hijaz.

The Nearest Land

In the allegedly-Meccan *sūrat ar-Rūm*, [145] the Quran (30:2-4) makes an ambiguous reference to a contemporaneous defeat suffered by the Romans (*ar-Rūm*) in the ‘nearest land’ (*adnā al-ard*):

The Romans have been conquered in the nearest (part) of the land, but after their conquering, they will conquer in a few years.[146]

Later Muslim historiography commonly associated this military allusion with the Roman-Persian War (602-628), and in particular with the temporary Persian conquest of Syria-Palestine, or the ‘nearest land’.[147] Even if later Muslim historiography is disregarded, this identification still seems plausible – assuming that this portion of the Quran was composed during the early 7th Century, the dramatic Roman-Persian War of this era is still the most obvious candidate for a notable Roman defeat. For Roman Syria-Palestine to be considered the ‘nearest land’ to an Arab observer, however, it is reasonable to infer that said observer would probably be situated in close proximity to said ‘nearest land’ – relative to Syria-Palestine, this would suggest an Arab onlooker from northwestern Arabia.[148]



The Persian-Roman War

It is not impossible that the Quran was referring to the ‘nearest land’ relative to the Romans, and not to the Quran-audience; [149] even if this were the case, however, the Quranic observation regarding the military endeavours of the Romans in Mesopotamia and/or the Levant still suggests an onlooker with some proximity and awareness of the conflict; it seems more plausible that a contemporaneous observation indicates a nearby proximity, as opposed to some remote vantage-point in southern Hijaz.

Becca

Within the allegedly-Medinese *sūrat āl-ʾImrān*, [150] the Quran (3:96-97) describes the sacred ‘First House’ (*awwal bayt*) of mankind, located at a place called Becca (*Bakka*); this sanctuary is

said to have been the 'station of Abraham' (*maqām Ibrāhīm*), to which the audience of the Quran are instructed to undertake religious pilgrimage (*ḥajj*):

Surely the first House laid down for the people was indeed that at Becca, a blessed (House) and a guidance for the worlds. In it are clear signs: the standing place of Abraham. Whoever enters it is secure. Pilgrimage to the House (an obligation) on the people to God – (for) anyone who is able (to make) a way to it. Whoever disbelieves – surely God is wealthy beyond the worlds.[151]

Later Muslim commentators generally considered Becca to be somehow synonymous with Mecca, arguing that the former was the name of the sanctuary and the latter the surrounding area, or *vice versa*. These explanations and hypotheses lack any historical basis, however, and seemingly arise from later Muslim attempts to clarify the ambiguities of the Quran.[152] In *lieu* of such theologising, there are at least two possible candidates for the mysterious *Bakka* mentioned in the text, both arising in connection to the Bible. Firstly, there is the 'Valley of Baka' (*'ēmeq hab-Bākā*) vaguely mentioned in the Psalms (84:6), which was associated with the region of Jerusalem:[153]

As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.[154]

A second possibility arises from the Book of Genesis (25:18), which describes how the descendants of Ishmāel "settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt, as you go toward Ashur." [155] The phrase 'as you go' is *b-k-h* in Hebrew [156] and *bākā* in Samaritan-Hebrew, which could indicate a connection between the *Bakka* mentioned in the Quran and this passage in Genesis. [157] Earlier in Genesis (16:7), the land of Shur is connected to Hagar, the mother of Ishmāel and the concubine of Abraham – this may indicate some kind of connection with the Quranic Becca, which is also associated with Abraham.



The Sinai of the Bible

Both of these interpretations would suggest a location somewhere in the southern Levant – the Psalmic ‘Valley of Baka’ near Jerusalem, and the *b-k-h* phrase in Genesis associated with the Sinaitic or Arabian region east of Egypt. Alternatively, however, it is also highly possible that *Bakka* is simply a corruption of *Makka*, born by means of a scribal error in the early textual-transmission of the Quran.[158] If this suggestion is correct, it could explain why the name ‘Mecca’ was transferred with the Ka’ba when the latter was relocated from Arabia Petræa to southern Hijaz (see below).

Mecca

Despite the extensive topographical literature produced by the Greeks and the Romans of Antiquity concerning the tribes and towns of the Arabian Peninsula, there are no known historical references to any south-Hijazian town called Mecca prior to the late-Umayyad era.[159] In the 2nd Century, however, the Græco-Roman geographer Ptolemy recorded a list of “the towns and villages in the interior” of the region of Arabia Petræa, including a certain “Moka”. [160] In other words, the only ‘Mecca’ known to Antiquity was located in northwestern Arabia, lending further indication to the partially-Petræan origin of the Quran; the text (Q. 48:24-25)—in the allegedly-Medinese *sūrat al-Faḥ*[161]—reminds its audience of events which occurred to them in the ‘Basin/Hollow of Mecca’ (*baṭn Makka*), where they struggled with a foe:

He (it is) who restrained their hands from you, and your hands from them, in the heart [i.e., basin or hollow—ed.] of Mecca, after He gave you victory over them – God sees what you do. They are those who disbelieved, and kept from you the Sacred Mosque and (also) the offering, (which was) prevented from reaching its lawful place.[162]

In the absence of any other known candidate in Antiquity, it is not unreasonable to identify the Mecca mentioned in the Quran with Ptolemy’s “Moka” in northwestern Arabia. This connection was noted by Crone, who remarked that “if Ptolemy mentions Mecca at all, he calls it Moka, a town in Arabia Petraea.”[163] Crone further indicated the possible convergence between the saliently-northwest milieu of palæo-Islam (even as remembered in Muslim historiography) and Ptolemy’s identification of Mecca in Arabia Petræa:

From the point of view of the rise of Islam, the problem may be restated as follows: We seem to have all the ingredients for Muḥammad’s career in northwest Arabia. Qurashī trade sounds perfectly viable, indeed more intelligible, without its south Arabian and Ethiopian extensions, and there is a case for a Qurashī trading centre, or at least diaspora, in the north. One might locate it in Ptolemy’s Moka.[164]

In conjunction with the Petræan milieu reflected within the Quran, it seems even more likely that the *Makka* mentioned therein is the same “Moka” known to Ptolemy, in Arabia Petræa.



Ptolemy's Levant

Perhaps the Basin of Mecca (*baṭn Makka*) was the same ‘uncultivated valley’ (*wād ḡayr dī zar*) allegedly settled by Abraham, near to the Sacred House (i.e., the Ka’ba-sanctuary of Becca);[165] if so, this might account for the association of the name ‘Mecca’ with the Ka’ba, and thus the continued association of that name—along with the henceforth-interchangeable name ‘Becca’—to the relocated Ka’ba in southern Hijaz (see below). Abraham’s valley (*wād*) is only described as uncultivated (*ḡayr dī zar*) upon his initial colonisation of that region – there is little indication that this valley remained in such a state permanently (and that it therefore conflicts with the lush agricultural environment reflected within the Quran);[166] indeed, “God’s revival of dead land is a prominent theme” within the Quran,[167] perhaps hinting at the transition of the land from barrenness to agriculture. The Quran does mention a ‘secure sanctuary’ (*ḥaram āmin*) that has fruits (*tamarāt*) transported to it[168] (possibly indicating the lack of agriculture at that sanctuary), but it isn’t clear that this site is the same sanctuary located at Becca; even if these two sanctuaries are taken to be synonymous, the Quran states that Abraham settled his descendants ‘proximate’ (*inda*) to the Sacred House, indicating perhaps that the valley and the sanctuary are nearby rather than the same location. Therefore, the sanctuary site itself could have been barren, whilst the nearby basin of Mecca—said to have been uncultivated at the time of the arrival of Abraham’s children—may have harboured the agricultural settlements of the Quran-audience and their hostile neighbours. This is speculation, but it might serve to disambiguate the confusion surrounding Mecca, Becca, and the initial relationship between these locations and the Ka’ba reflected within the Quran.

The initial prayer-direction

The Petræan milieu saliently reflected within the Quran is strongly corroborated by external literary evidence, which indicates that the initial prayer-direction (*qibla*) for palæo-Muslims was orientated towards a location somewhere in the southern Levant. The Syriac chronicler Jacob of Edessa—the bishop of that city from 684 to 688, and a contemporaneous eye-witness to the practices of palæo-Muslims—recorded the following *circa* 691:

Your question is vain... for it is not to the south that the Jews pray, nor either do the Muslims (*mhaggrāyē*). The Jews who live in Egypt, and also the Muslims there, as I saw with my own eyes and will now set out for you, prayed to the east, and still do, both peoples—the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards the Ka’ba. And those Jews who are to the south of Jerusalem pray to the north; and those in the land of Babel, in Hira and in Baṣra, pray to the

west. And also the Muslims who are there pray to the west, towards the Ka'ba; and those who are to the south of the Ka'ba pray to the north, towards that place. So from all this that has been said, it is clear that it is not to the south that the Jews and Muslims here in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Ka'ba, the patriarchal places of their races.[169]

The implications of this eye-witness testimony are significant: according to Jacob, both the Jews and 'Hagarenes' (i.e., Muslims) in Egypt and Iraq pray towards locations in the southern Levant – the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards their Ka'ba, respectively.[170] Hints to this initial south-Levantine orientation of the prayer-direction can even be found within later Muslim historiography; a narrative attributed to the early Kufan-Muslim chronicler Sayf ibn-'Umar (d. 796) indicates that the prayer-direction for the earliest mosque in the south-Iraqian town of Kufa was orientated westwards,[171] as does the story of the founding of the mosque recounted subsequently by the Baghdadian-Muslim chronicler al-Balāḍurī (d. 892).[172] Likewise, the late-mediæval chroniclers ibn-Duqmāq (d. 1406) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) recount that the earliest mosque in the Egyptian town of Fustat was built with a prayer-direction orientated eastwards.[173] This is perhaps reiterated by the Egyptian-Christian chronicler Mawhūb ibn-Manṣūr (d. c. 1100), in whose Copto-Arabic chronicle it is recorded that the Arabs pray towards the southeast or eastwards.[174]



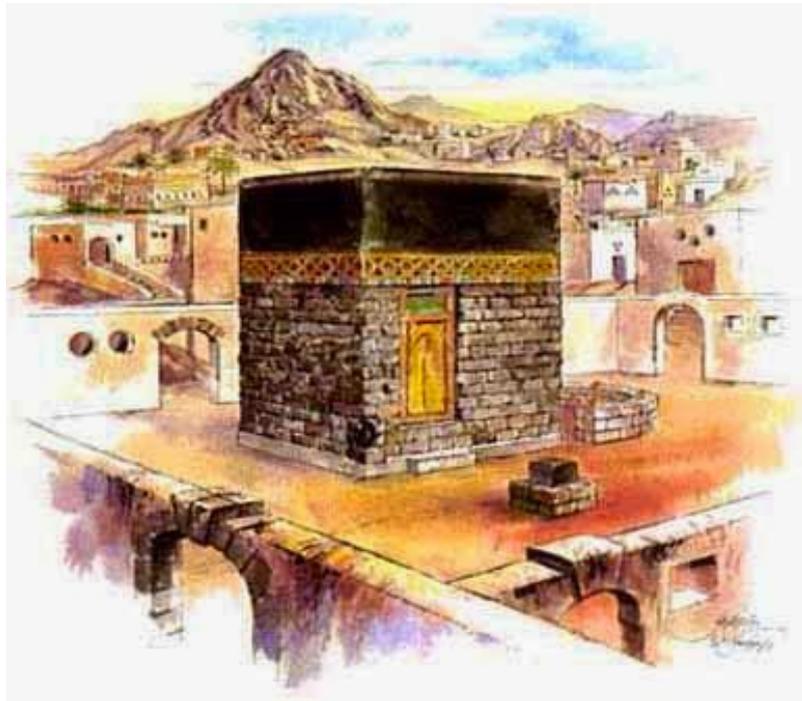
An approximation of the *qibla* described by Jacob of Edessa

Overall, the literary evidence—particularly the early testimony of Jacob the Edessene—seems persuasive: the initial prayer-direction for palæo-Muslims in the Middle East was orientated towards a location somewhere in the southern Levant, seemingly conforming with the Petræan milieu reflected in the Quran and Ptolemy's identification of Mecca in the region of Arabia Petræa.

North to South: when, how, and why?

It seems extremely probable that the original Ka'ba and the Quranic milieu were situated within the region of Arabia Petræa, in the northwestern corner of the Peninsula bounding the Holy Land. However, an important question is immediately generated by this conclusion: by what means was the Petræan Ka'ba and ur-Mecca (regardless of whether the two were initially

discrete) supplanted by the south-Hijazian neo-Mecca and Ka'ba of posterity, and for what reason?



A depiction of the early *Ka'ba*

The *kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* of al-Balāḡurī—one of the earliest and seminal Muslim chronicles, composed during the 9th Century—records the possible instance when this transition occurred: the successive destruction of the Ka'ba during the Umayyad-Zubayrid struggle (c. 680-692), and the successive rebuilding of the Ka'ba by the rebel ibn-az-Zubayr and the Umayyad governor and general al-Ḥajjāj ibn-Yūsuf consecutively:

When 'Abdallāh ibn-az-Zubair ibn-al-'Auwām fortified himself in the Ḥaram-mosque, taking refuge in it against al-Ḥuṣain ibn-Numair as-Sakūni who was fighting with a Syrian army, one of 'Abdallāh's followers carried one day burning fibres of a palm-tree on the top of a lance. The wind being violent, a spark flew and attached itself to the curtains of the Ka'bah and burnt them. As a result, the walls were cracked, and turned black. This took place in the year 64. After the death of Yazīd ibn-Mu'āwiyah and the departure of al-Ḥuṣain ibn-Numair to Syria, ibn-az-Zubair ordered that the stones that had been thrown into it be removed, and they were removed. He then demolished the Ka'bah, and rebuilt it on its old foundation, using stones in the building. He opened two doors on the ground, one to the east, and the other to the west; one for entrance and the other for exit. In building it he found that the foundation was laid on al-Ḥijr. His object was to give it the shape it had in the days of Abraham, as it had been described to him by 'Ā'ishah, the mother of the believers, on the authority of the Prophet. The doors of the Ka'bah, ibn-az-Zubair plated with gold, and its keys he made of gold. When al-Ḥajjāj ibn-Yusūf fought on behalf of 'Abd-al-Malik ibn-Marwān and killed ibn-az-Zubair, 'Abd al-Malik wrote to al-Ḥajjāj ordering him to rebuild the Ka'bah and the Ḥaram-mosque, the stones hurled at it having made cracks in the walls. Accordingly, al-Ḥajjāj pulled the Ka'bah down and rebuilt it according to the shape given it by Quraysh, removing all stones thereof.[175]

In other words, Muslim historiography records the destruction of the Ka'ba in 692 at the hands of al-Ḥajjāj and his army, during their conquest of Mecca. It seems probable that when al-Ḥajjāj rebuilt Mecca and the Ka'ba, he relocated the sanctuary southwards to its current south-

Hijazian locality; it seems unlikely that this occurred earlier with the reconstructions undertaken by ibn-az-Zubayr, since he appeared to be championing the authentic ‘House of God’ central to the unadulterated Muhammadian ideology.[176] Moreover, Muslim historiography preserves hints to the Petraean provenance of Mecca during the post-Mu‘āwiya intra-Arab *fitna*, according to Crone and Cook: “In both the first and second civil wars, we find accounts of people proceeding from Medina to Iraq via Mecca.”[177] Admittedly, however, the narrative cited by Crone and Cook regarding the ‘second civil war’ concerns the journey of al-Ḥusayn ibn-‘Alī (who died prior to ibn-az-Zubayr’s rebuilding of the Ka’ba); nevertheless, it is only following this war—during the reign of ‘Abd-al-Malik and onwards—that the reorientation of the prayer-direction is detectable in the archæological record.[178] Moreover, the Edessene chronicler Jacob was writing subsequent to the reconstruction-efforts of ibn-az-Zubayr and towards the end of the Umayyad-Zubayrid conflict when he recorded (*circa* 691) the contemporaneous orientation of the palæo-Muslim prayer-direction towards the southern Levant. Hence, it seems likely that al-Ḥajjāj oversaw the sanctuary-shift from Arabia Petraea to southern Hijaz, and not ibn-az-Zubayr.

The first evidence for a change in the prayer-direction appears a decade subsequent to the testimony of Jacob (c. 691) and the death of ibn-az-Zubayr (d. 692), during the early 700s. This alteration is noticeable in the remains of the Mosque of Wasit (with the earliest identifiable prayer-direction in the archæological record) and the Mosque of Uskāf banī-Junayd (near Baghdad); both buildings were located in Iraq, both were allegedly founded by al-Ḥajjāj, and both have a prayer-direction orientated towards northern Hijaz; the date of the Uskāf banī-Junayd Mosque seems uncertain, but the Wasit Mosque appears to have been founded *circa* 703.[179] The reason for this intermediate prayer-direction between the initial ur-Mecca of Arabia Petraea and the current neo-Mecca of southern Hijaz is unclear[180] – in all subsequent mosques built by al-Ḥajjāj and the caliph al-Walīd ibn-‘Abd-al-Malik (r. 705-715), the orientation of the prayer-direction becomes fixed. From this point onwards, the modern Mecca of southern Hijaz became the permanent focus for the prayer-direction,[181] and all prior mosque-orientations were rectified by al-Walīd and his successors to face this new southern sanctuary.[182]

These efforts were not without consequence – according to the Abbasid-era chronicler aṭ-Ṭabarī (839-923), the earlier Umayyad-era preacher al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (642-728) allegedly castigated the Syrian-Arab army of the Umayyads as follows, during the reign of Yazīd II (*circa* 720-724):

May God afflict them and render them hideous! Are they not the ones who desecrated the sacred precinct of the Messenger of God, slaughtering its inhabitants for three days and three nights, declaring them lawful for their Nabataeans and Copts, carrying off free, pious women, and not holding back from violating the honour of any sacred thing? Then they went to God’s sacred house and destroyed the Ka’bah, lighting fires amidst its stones and coverings. May the curse of God and the evil of the (Last) Abode be upon them![183]

Even the alteration of the prayer-direction specifically elicited consternation in later Muslim scholarship, such as the writings of the Mu’tazilite scholar al-Jāhiz (776-869):

There arose ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and his son Walīd and their agent Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf and his client Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim. They again demolished the House and attacked the sacred precinct of Medina. They pulled down the Ka’ba, violating what is inviolable, and instituted a deviant direction of prayer at Wasit.[184]

When the Quran-reciters (*qurrā’*) of Kufa and Basra joined the rebellion of ibn-al-Aṣ‘aṭ against the rule of ‘Abd-al-Malik (c. 699-702), they allegedly accused the Umayyads of having ‘killed the prayer’ (*imātat aṣ-ṣalāh*), and rallied under the battle-cry ‘avenge the prayer’ (*yā tārāt aṣ-ṣalāh*)[185] – perhaps this was an angry reaction to the relocation of the Ka’ba and the reorientation of the prayer-direction that was undertaken by the Umayyads during this period.[186]



Someone's attempt to map the *qibla* of al-Ḥajjāj's early mosques

This scenario satisfies the question of *when* Mecca transitioned from Arabia Petræa to southern Hijaz, but it still leaves unaddressed the question of *why* this process was undertaken. There are several factors that could explain and contextualise the probable rationale for this Umayyad policy:

- **Firstly:** it may have been politically-expedient for the Umayyads to distance the cultic-centre of their state-ideology from the politico-religious stain of the rebel Zubayrids, and to distance this source of anti-Umayyad religious piety and rebellion farther from the state capital of Damascus; this could be achieved by physically-relocating the sanctuary.
- **Secondly:** the relocation of the sanctuary to a site near to the south-Hijazian oasis of Ta'if probably derived from the prior Umayyad connection to the region – Ta'if featured a summer-palace belonging to Mu'āwiya—who sought to better-consolidate the region through such projects and infrastructure-building—and was also subject to the governorship of Marwān ibn-al-Ḥakam, and the birthplace of al-Ḥajjāj; consequently, the relocation and conversion of the Ka'ba to a sanctuary near to Ta'if is probably no coincidence. It is not unreasonable to suppose (as Tom Holland does) that an ancient sanctuary of some descript was already extant in this south-Hijazian location, and that both 'Abd-al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj “would surely have been intimately familiar with the shrine that stood a mere sixty miles to the north-west” of Ta'if.[187]
- **Thirdly:** It may have been theologically-expedient to situate Muḥammad within a rural pagan outpost, in order to demonstrate the originality and miraculousness of his message *vis-à-vis* his immediate pagan environment and distance from monotheistic civilisations.[188]

- **Fourthly:** It is possible that the concept of a sanctuary (*ḥaram*)—such as the Ka'ba of Mecca—was flexible or transferable; according Robert Serjeant (albeit based upon Muslim historiography), the sanctity of a sanctuary would extend to the custodial family of said sanctuary, whose acquired holiness would allow them to shift or recreate the sanctuary in another location.[189] In this fashion, one may make sense of the reported establishment of a sanctuary in Jerusalem by 'Abd-al-Malik during his war with ibn-az-Zubayr, when the latter controlled the ḥaramayn of Mecca and Medina;[190] this might also help to contextualise how al-Ḥajjāj could have relocated the Ka'ba-*ḥaram* of Mecca from one area to another.
- **Fifthly:** The regime of 'Abd-al-Malik was uniquely placed to impose such a change upon the palæo-Muslim *umma*, since every major early sectarian group within palæo-Islam—who would otherwise have posed a threat or resistance to such a change—were all crushed in the ascendancy of 'Abd al-Malik: the palæo-Shi'ites of Kufa led by al-Muḥtār ibn-abī-'Ubayd were suppressed by ibn-az-Zubayr (c. 687);[191] the traditionalists of Mecca and Medina led by ibn-az-Zubayr were suppressed by 'Abd-al-Malik (c. 692);[192] the Najdite-Kharijites of eastern Arabia led by 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Ṭawr were also suppressed by 'Abd-al-Malik (c. 693);[193] and soon afterwards, the Azraqite-Kharijites of Iran led by Qaṭarī ibn-al-Fujā'a were likewise suppressed by 'Abd-al-Malik (c. 699).[194] In other words, any possibility for resistance had already been crushed by the establishment of the political domination of 'Abd-al-Malik over the palæo-Muslim *umma*. [195]

Regardless of motivations and means, however, the fundamental fact of the matter remains: the original location of the Ka'ba and Mecca—the *ur*-Mecca—was probably the Levantine fringe of northwestern Arabia, from which the town and sanctuary were subsequently relocated to the traditional Muslim *neo*-Mecca of southern Hijaz.

Conclusion

The origins of the Quran within the geographical nexus between Syria-Palestine and northwestern Arabia—approximately the region known as *Arabia Petraea* during Antiquity—seems highly probable, for the following reasons:

- The Quran clearly presupposes a Syriac-influenced Arab audience heavily steeped in Judæo-Christian tradition, if not an outright Arab-Jewish and Arab-Christian audience – ostensibly somewhere on the Arabian fringes of Palestine.
- The Quran-audience is connected to an ambiguous 'Two Seas', of which the best candidates seem Levantine in proximity.
- The society which produced the Quran was evidently one of farmers and fishermen, whose agricultural and maritime activities are assumed and described in the text; the production of grain and olives in particular suggests a location close to the Mediterranean Sea.
- The Arabian history emphasised in the Quran overwhelmingly focuses upon the northwestern corner of the Peninsula, suggesting an immediate geographical and historical familiarity and proximity to the region on the part of the author and his audience; this is especially notable given the author's observation that his audience is surrounded by ancient ruins.
- The Quran-audience is assumed to be normally proximate to the Dead Sea, passing by the area associated with Lot on a daily basis.
- The Quran ostensibly refers to Syria-Palestine as the 'nearest land', suggesting *prima facie* that the author and his audience are onlookers from nearby northwestern Arabia.

- The Quran emphasises an Abrahamic sanctuary in a place called Becca, for which the most plausible candidates are all south-Levantine in provenance.
- The Quran mentions the struggles of its audience at a place called Mecca, probably indicating the 'Moka' known to Antiquity in the region of Arabia Petræa.
- A relatively-early Syriac source attests to the south-Levantine orientation of the prayer-direction (*qibla*) for palæo-Muslims, which is even hinted in later Muslim historiography.

Whilst the politico-religious career of Muḥammad in the central-Hijazian town of Medinese still seems possible, his origins in southern Hijaz seems unlikely – instead, the Quran clearly reflects a Petræan-Arabian milieu, indicating the probable origin of the author and his audience in that region.

Appendix: The Quranic Sanctuary

The Quran tells of a place called Becca, the location of both the ‘First House’ (*awwal bayt*) and the ‘station of Abraham’ (*maqām Ibrāhīm*), and thus the focus for ‘pilgrimage’ (*ḥajj*).[196] Presumably, this is the same Abrahamic house-sanctuary referred to elsewhere as God’s ‘Sacred House’ (*bayt al-muḥarram*), near to which Abraham is said to have settled his offspring in an ‘uncultivated valley’ (*wād ḡayr dī zar’*) in order for them to maintain the ‘prayer’ (*ṣalāt*).[197] This Abraham-associated house-sanctuary is also probably the ‘Sacred House’ (*bayt al-ḥarām*) referred to twice in *sūrat al-Mā’ida*,[198] and described in one passage is being synonymous with the ‘Ka’ba’ (*ka’ba*) and made sacred by God[199] – this may also be the town or territory (*balda*) mentioned elsewhere as having been made sacred (*ḥarrama*) by the Lord.[200] The other relevant passage within *sūrat al-Mā’ida* also mentions a certain ‘Sacred Temple’ (*masjid al-ḥarām*),[201] but it isn’t immediately clear from the text whether or not this Sacred Temple is also synonymous or even geographically-proximate with the aforementioned Sacred House. However, given that several other passages seem to assume that the ‘pilgrimage’ (*ḥajj*) is undertaken to the Sacred Temple,[202] it seems plausible that this Sacred Temple and the Abraham-associated House are both in Becca (previously noted as the focus for pilgrimage), if not outright synonymous with each other. Moreover, *sūrat al-Ḥajj* mentions the disbarment of its audience from the Sacred Temple, and then immediately recalls God’s assignment of the site of the ‘House’ (*bayt*) to Abraham, and implicitly approves circumambulation around and prostration towards said House.[203] Consequently, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Sacred Temple and the Sacred House are one and the same, or at least in the same location. This Sacred Temple is frequently mentioned as being the centre of some past conflict with a hostile population, who allegedly expelled the Quran-audience and barred them from accessing the site.[204] (The Quran also specifies the victory of its audience over this same foe in a certain Mecca Basin.[205]) The Quran commands its audience to pray in the ‘direction’ (*qibla*) the Sacred Temple,[206] and also forbids them to fight within its vicinity except in self-defence.[207] The Quran also mentions a certain treaty made with the so-called Associators (*muṣṣrikūn*) at the Sacred Temple, which—unlike other treaties with the Associators[208]—must be honoured.[209] However, a subsequent passage within the same chapter—*sūrat at-Tawba*—describes the Associators as being ‘unclean’ (*najas*), and commands its contemporaneous audience to bar any Associators from accessing the Sacred Temple after the completion of the year.[210] Finally, the Quran vaguely describes how God made his ‘servant’ (*‘abd*) journey in the night from the Sacred Temple to the ‘Remotest Temple’ (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*), which God surrounded with blessings (*bāraknā ḥawla*) to demonstrate his signs (*āyāt*).[211]

Additionally, the Quran (29:67) also speaks of a certain ‘secure sanctuary’ (*ḥaram āmin*) in which the Quran-audience was protected at some point in the past, and elsewhere (Q. 28:57) of the transport of ‘fruits’ (*ṭamarāt*) to said ‘secure sanctuary’ (*ḥaram āmin*).

Are all of these sanctuaries, sacred temples, sacred houses, and sacred towns/territories mentioned within the Quran actually just the same location? Ostensible, it would seem plausible that they are all one and the same: an Abrahamic sanctuary in a place called Becca.

* Even if the Quran was produced by multiple authors and not merely (or even) Muḥammad, this would not alter the significance of the cultural milieu reflected by the discrete materials therein in determining the environment which produced said materials. Needless to say, the traditional Muslim thesis that the Quran originated from God via an angel (rather than Muḥammad himself) can be disregarded, as can all other appeals to prāternatural agency in history; for the necessity of methodological naturalism within historiography, see: Morris, *'The Prophet and the Rabbit'*, Tidbits of Wisdom:

http://www.iandavidmorris.com/the_prophet_and_the_rabbit_why_historians_dont_take_miracles_seriously

[1] Crone, *Meccan Trade*, p. 204.

[2] For a summary, see: Little, *'Sources for early Islamic history'*, Researching Islam: <http://research-islam.blogspot.com/2015/07/sources-for-early-islamic-history.html>

[3] E.g.: Q. 3:3, 4:163, 5:68, etc.; in one instance (7:157), the Quran-author is seemingly claimed to have been prophesied in the prior scripture. It is worth noting that the Quranic conception of the Torah (*Tawrāt*), Psalms (*Zabūr*), and Gospels (*Injīl*) diverges somewhat from the traditional Jewish and Christian conceptions of those texts.

[4] Kassis, *Concordance*, pp. 793-796.

[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 431-432.

[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 104-105.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 864.

[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 777-778.

[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 108-109

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 1310.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 750.

[12] *Ibidem*, pp. 294-295.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 495.

[14] *Ibidem*, pp. 1064-1065.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 1078.

[16] *Ibidem*, pp. 379-380.

[17] *Ibidem*, pp. 1303-1304.

[18] *Ibidem*, pp. 182-183.

[19] *Ibidem*, pp. 778-779.

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 322.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 1325.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 493.

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 564.

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 570.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 202.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 1321.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 919.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 267.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 143.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 583.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 593.

[32] *Ibidem*, p. 1237.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 1310.

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 378.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 210.

[36] *Ibidem*, p. 296.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 761.

[38] The *ṣaḥīfat Yaṭrib* (cited in: ibn-Ishāq, *The Life*, pp. 231-232) begins: “This is a document from Muḥammad the prophet [governing the relations] between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, followed them and joined them and laboured with them.” The text (*ibidem*, p. 233) later states: “Yathrib shall be a sanctuary for the people of this document.” The *ṣaḥīfat Yaṭrib* seems plausible archaic: Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 7; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, p. 7; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 548, n. 17; Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, p. 22.

[39] The *ṣaḥīfat Yaṭrib* mentions no Christians, and only superficial Christian influences are attested within traditional Muslim historiography, such as the brief visitation of a Christian delegation from Najrān (ibn-Ishāq, *The Life*, pp. 270-277).

[40] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, p. 3; cf. Al-Azmeh (*The Emergence of Islam*, p. 259), who claims that “there may have been some Christians *de passage* there and elsewhere in the region or indeed individual Christians at Mecca and Medina.” As Al-Azmeh (*ibidem*, n. 655) clarifies, however, “it needs to be noted that what evidence there is of Christians in the Hijāz indicates that they were foreigners.” Evidently, there was no significant Christian presence within central or southern Hijaz, of the sort presupposed and reflected within the Quran; only the merest influences are attested within traditional Muslim historiography for Christianity in Hijaz. For example, the early chronicler ibn-Ishāq (*The Life*) reported: the Ka'ba of Mecca contained an icon of Jesus and Mary (p. 552); Muḥammad encountered a Christian monk on a journey to Syria (pp. 79-81); Muḥammad's cousin-in-law Waraqa had once been a Christian and studied Christian writings (p. 69); and Muḥammad occasionally interacted with a Christian slave named Jabr (p. 180). Admittedly, ibn-Ishāq (p. 146) does mention the emigration of some palæo-Muslims from Mecca to the Christian environment of Aksum for a period of time, but this cannot satisfy the problem of the Quran's presuming a Christian or Christianised audience; allusions to Christian materials appear within the so-called Meccan portions of the text as well as the Medinese portions, and it was only towards the *end* of Muḥammad's career in Mecca that these emigrants to Aksum returned to Hijaz to re-join their brethren (p. 167). Besides, ibn-Ishāq (p. 169) specifies: “The total number of his companions who came to Mecca from Abyssinia was thirty-three men.” Subsequently, ibn-Ishāq (p. 179) records that some two-dozen Christians from Abyssinia visited Muḥammad and converted to Islam, but none of this seems adequate to explain the Quran's routine assumption of a general audience intimately familiar with Judæo-Christian materials (in both Meccan and Medinese chapters, by the traditional determination).

[41] Q. 53:19-26 mentions the intercessory angelic beings al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā, and Manāt invoked by its contemporaries; Q. 71:23 mentions the worship of Wadd, Suwā', Yağūt, Ya'ūq, and Nasr amongst the contemporaries of Noah; Q. 37:125 mentions the worship of Ba'l by the contemporaries of Elijah; concerning the polytheistic culture and pantheon asserted by later Muslim legend, Hawting (*The Idea*, p. 112) observed: “As we have said, the vast majority of the names are not to be found in the Koran where, apart from the ambiguous reference to the Lord of Sirius, only the three ‘daughters of Allāh’ and the five noachian idols are mentioned by name.” In his seminal study on the subject of ‘association’ (*širk*) in the Quran, Hawting (summarised: *ibidem*, p. iii) concluded that “the ‘associators’ (*mushrikūn*) attacked in the Koran were monotheists whose beliefs and practices were judged to fall short of true monotheism and were portrayed polemically as idolatry.” Seemingly, the actual polytheism and idolatry mentioned in the Quran is rather minimal – the text is principally concerned with attacking impure monotheism, such as Christian trinitarianism (Q. 4:171, 5:73, 5:116), or divine parentage (Q. 19:88-93, 23:91, 112:1-4); Jews and Christians are even explicitly cited as being guilty of ‘associating’ (*yušrikū*) and being ‘associators’ (*mušrikūn*) (Q. 9:29-33; also see 5:72-73, which alludes to Christians ‘associating’).

[42] For a brief summary of Wansbrough's research on this subject, see: Rippin, ‘*Literary Analysis of Koran, Tafsir, and Sira*’, in Ibn Warraq (ed.), *The Origins of the Koran*, pp. 359-361; also see: Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, p. 119; Peters, ‘*The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*’, I.J.M.E.S, 23, 3 (1991), p. 296; Reynolds, ‘*Western critical scholars' approach to introducing the origins of Islam*’, Fortress Press (13th/July/2012): <http://youtu.be/XXxzxPWIASI>

[43] Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 2, 19; even some ostensibly ‘Jewish’ or ‘Hebrew’ materials within the Quran seem to derive from Syriac Christianity, as argued by Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān*.

[44] For the Christian and Syriac presence throughout Arabia, see: Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, pp. 185-186; Holes, ‘*The Dispute of Coffee and Tea*’, in Smith (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, pp. 304-306; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 19-22.

[45] *Ibidem*, p. 22.

[46] Finster (‘*Arabia in Late Antiquity*’, in Neuwirth, Sinai, & Marx (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 70-72) notes that within northwestern Arabia, Christianity had spread to the tribes of Juḏām (including 'Uḏra [‘Uṭra?]), and Kalb during Late Antiquity; Cragg (*The Arab Christian*, p. 44) similarly notes the Christianisation of *banū-'Uṭra* (“in the region between the Dead Sea and Tabūk”) and *banū-Ṣāliḥ* (“east of the Jordan”). Trimmingham (cited in: Norris, ‘*The Sad Fate of Bishr and Hind*’, in Smith, Smart, & Pridham (eds.), *New Arabian Studies*, iii, p. 95—observed a ‘dividing line’ at

Wādī al-Qurā (near Ḳaybar), above which Christianity predominated, and below which polytheism predominated. Cragg (*The Arab Christian*, p. 36) noted that the influence of Aramaic Christianity was “significant in Ghassānid and Lakhmid territories, and its language—Aramaic/Syriac—supplied many words to the vocabulary of Arabic theology, some of which found their way into the Qurʾān itself.”

[47] Sozomenus (trans. Hartranft), ‘*The Ecclesiastical History*’, in Schaff & Wace (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, ii, p. 375.

[48] Silverstein, ‘*Abrahamic Experiments in History*’, in Blidstein (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*, pp. 38-39.

[49] Nevo & Koren, ‘*The Origins*’, p. 41.

[50] E.g.: Q. 2:130, 2:135, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, 6:79, 6:161, 12:38, 16:120, 16:123, 22:78, etc.

[51] Traditional Muslim scholars have posited several candidates for *al-baḥrayn* over the centuries: *E.I.2*, s.v. ‘*al-Baḥrayn*’, pp. 940-941; *E.Q.*, s.v. ‘*Barrier*’, pp. 203-204.

[52] Q. 18:60, 25:53, 27:61, 35:12, 55:19.

[53] Q. 25:53, 27:61, 55:20.

[54] Q. 55:19-20.

[55] Q. 25:53, 35:12.

[56] Q. 35:12.

[57] Q. 55:22; also note the ‘ornaments’ (*hilya*) mentioned in Q. 35:12.

[58] Q. 55:22.

[59] Q. 35:12, 55:24.

[60] Shaked & Genin, ‘*Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba*’, in Hopley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Modern Coral Reefs*, p. 839.

[61] Kunz & Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl*, p. 139.

[62] Q. 18:60-61.

[63] Indeed, such a proposition isn’t alien to traditional Muslim scholarship; in his annotated commentary of *tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, in response to the statement of the Jalālayn (*Tafsīr*, p. 270) that the barrier between *al-baḥrayn* refers to “the point where the Byzantine sea and the Persian sea meet, beyond the east,” the translator Feras Hamza (*ibidem*, p. 270, n. 15) states: “Presumably, the Byzantine sea would denote the Mediterranean, while the Persian sea might have been the Red sea, if seen as an extension of the Persian Gulf coastline; all of which suggests that the area in question is just beyond the Sinai desert near the modern-day Suez Canal.”

[64] Crone, ‘*How did the quranic pagans make a living?*’, *B.S.I.A.S.*, 68, 3 (2005), pp. 395-396.

[65] *E.Q.*, s.v. ‘*Agriculture and Vegetation*’, pp. 40-43.

[66] Regarding ‘harvest’ (*ukul*), see: Kassis, *Concordance*, p. 124.

[67] Regarding ‘lentils’ (*adas*), see: *ibidem*, p. 221.

[68] Regarding ‘vine/grapes’ (*inab*), see: *ibidem*, p. 269; regarding ‘cluster of grapes’ (*qinwān*), see: *ibidem*, p. 912.

[69] Regarding ‘herbs’ (*baql*), see: *ibidem*, p. 328.

[70] Regarding ‘cow’ (*baqara*), see: *ibidem*, pp. 328-329.

[71] Regarding ‘onions’ (*baṣal*), see: *ibidem*, p. 340.

[72] Regarding ‘sheep’ (*daʿn*), see: *ibidem*, p. 401; regarding ‘sheep’ (*ḡanam*), see: *ibidem*, p. 469.

[73] Regarding ‘garlic’ (*fūm*), see: *ibidem*, p. 452.

[74] Regarding ‘grain’ (*ḥabba*), see: *ibidem*, p. 509.

[75] Regarding ‘garden’ (*ḥadāʾiq*), see: *ibidem*, p. 513; regarding ‘garden’ (*janna*), see: *ibidem*, pp. 601-604.

[76] Regarding ‘tillage’ (*ḥaraṭa*), see: *ibidem*, p. 548; regarding ‘to pasture’ (*raʿá*), see: *ibidem*, p. 970; regarding ‘pasture’ (*marʿá*), see: *ibidem*, p. 970.

[77] Regarding ‘cattle/flocks’ (*naʿam*), see: *ibidem*, p. 803.

[78] Regarding ‘cucumbers’ (*qittā*), see: *ibidem*, p. 933.

- [79] Regarding 'pomegranates' (*rummān*), see: *ibidem*, p. 1020.
- [80] Regarding 'fresh dates' (*ruṭab*), see: *ibidem*, p. 1036.
- [81] Regarding 'fig' (*tīn*), see: *ibidem*, p. 1219.
- [82] Regarding 'fruit' (*tamara*), see: *ibidem*, p. 1224.
- [83] Regarding 'sowing/planting' (*zara'a*), see: *ibidem*, pp. 1329-1330.
- [84] Regarding 'olives/olive-tree' (*zaytūna*), see: *ibidem*, p. 1337.
- [85] Crone, 'How did the quranic pagans make a living?', pp. 387-390.
- [86] *Ibidem*, p. 390.
- [87] *Ibidem*, p. 394.
- [88] E.g.: Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, p. 118: "Mecca, where the Qur'ān began to be revealed, was a town in the middle of a mountainous region that had very little water and no agriculture."
- [89] Crone, 'How did the quranic pagans make a living', p. 388.
- [90] E.g.: Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, pp. 131-132.
- [91] Crone, 'How did the quranic pagans make a living', p. 391.
- [92] The Quran mentions God causing the growth of grain (6:99, 50:9, 78:15, 80:27), and even claims that God causes the growth of the grain that the audience eats (36:33); the latter is allegedly-Meccan: e.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, viii, p. 167; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 415.
- [93] The Quran mentions God causing the growth of olive gardens (6:99, 6:141), and even tells its audience that God causes their olive-crops to grow (16:11); the latter is allegedly-Meccan: e.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, v, p.428; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 236.
- [94] Crone, 'How did the quranic pagans make a living', p. 393.
- [95] Crone, 'What do we actually know about Mohammed?' Open Democracy (10th/June/2008): https://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/mohammed_3866.jsp
- [96] Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 60.
- [97] *Ibidem*, p. 73.
- [98] Lancaster & Lancaster, *People, Land and Water in the Arab Middle East*, p. 25.
- [99] Nicolle, *Yarmuk AD 636*, p. 11.
- [100] Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, ii, 2, p. 45.
- [101] Crone, 'Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God', in Townsend & Vidas (eds.), *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, pp. 316-317; E.Q, s.v. 'Punishment Stories', pp. 318-322.
- [102] E.I.2, s.v. 'Aṣḥāb al-Rass', p. 38.
- [103] Q. 36:13-29; ibn-Kaṭīr, *Stories of the Prophet*, pp. 305, 307; in any case the Quran itself gives no information regarding the identity of the "city" in question.
- [104] E.I.2, s.v. 'Aṣḥāb al-Uḫḫūd', p. 692; Tottoli (E.Q, s.v. 'Aṣḥāb al-Uḫḫūd', pp. 43-44) notes the wild variety of interpretations given in Muslim historiography to identify the Trench People, a problem that hasn't yet been solved by modern scholarship.
- [105] E.Q, s.v. 'People of the Elephant', pp. 44-45; Muslim historiography identifies the Elephant People as the Abyssinian army led by the Aksumite king Abraha, who allegedly invaded Hijaz to conquer Mecca in 570 CE. However, Shahid (*ibidem*, p. 45) notes: "It is equally difficult to accept or reject any of the above data as provided by the Arabic Islamic tradition." Shahid (*ibidem*) further notes: "The sūra itself yields only the following: the expedition of the People of the Elephant was a serious and important event; the destruction of the invading host was theologically presented, effected by God himself; and since the sūra was addressed to the Prophet, the implication is that he or his city or Quraysh benefited from this divine intervention on their behalf. [...] Attempts to invoke the epigraphic evidence from south Arabia to shed light on the People of the Elephant have failed." Despite all of this, Shahid attempts to historicise this episode, but his historical reconstruction assumes a south-Hijaz provenance for Muḥammad's Mecca; consequently, Shahīd's argument cannot be used as evidence for the location of Muḥammad's Mecca in southern Hijaz, since this conclusion is a presupposed premise in his argument.

[106] Q. 44:37, 50:14; the word *tubba'* appears to be of southern-Arabian provenance, where the term—according to later Muslim historiography—was used as a title of rulership. However, Beeston (*E.I.2*, s.v. '*Tubba'*', p. 576) states: "It is not clear how the Muslim writers came to envisage *Tubba'* as a title; for though *Tb'krb* occurs as the individual name of a king of an earlier dynasty, the *Tabābi'a* themselves used only the style *mlk* as title." Hence, the term is ambiguous, and the Quranic reference more-so. It could be argued that the southern-Arabian provenance of the term/name *tubba'* undermines the identification of the Quran-author as a northwestern indigene, but such a perspective ignores the fact that the most significant Arabian nations and civilisations mentioned in the Quran—those elaborated and elucidated in the most detail (i.e., Midian, Thamud, and Aad), with reference to specific cities and architecture—were all located in northwestern Arabia; by contrast, the *qawm tubba'* are briefly mentioned only twice in the entire Quran, without any detail or elaboration. To quote Crone and Cook (*Hagarism*, p. 23): "All of the significant *umam khāliya* of the Arabian past are to be sought here: Midian, Thamūd and 'Ād. And note how the Prophet tells his contemporaries that God has destroyed cities around them (46:26)."

[107] The Quran-author claims on multiple occasions (12:1-6, 13:37, 20:113, 26:193-195, 39:28, 41:2-3, 42:7, 43:2-3, 46:12) that the Quran is a 'book' (*kitāb*) or 'recitation' (*qur'ān*) that was revealed in 'clear Arabic' ('*arabiy mubīn*) for the ease and comprehension of its Arabic-speaking audience. In one instance (16:103), the author of the Quran even defends himself against an accusation of plagiarism by asserting that the Quran was revealed in Arabic, and not the foreign language of his supposed source.

[108] Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 23.

[109] *E.Q.*, s.v. '*Midian*', p. 390.

[110] *E.Q.*, s.v. '*Thamūd*', p. 254.

[111] *E.I.1* s.v. '*Thamūd*', p. 736.

[112] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, pp. 68-69; *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Thamūd*', p. 436.

[113] ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsir*, iv, p. 92; ibn-Kaṭīr, *Stories of the Prophet*, p. 90.

[114] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Ād*', p. 169; Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai*, p. 49.

[115] Q. 15:78, 26:176-191, 38:13, 50:14.

[116] *E.Q.*, s.v. '*People of the Thicket*', pp. 53-54.

[117] Beeston, '*The "Men of the Tanglewood" in the Qur'an*', *J.S.S.* 13 (1968), pp. 253-252; *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Dhu 'l-Sharā'*', pp. 246-247.

[118] Q. 7:85-93, 11:84-95.

[119] Q. 26:176-184.

[120] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Madyan Shu'ayb*', p. 1156; Beeston, '*The "Men of the Tanglewood"*', pp. 254-255.

[121] 1st Kings 10:10-13, 2nd Chronicles 9:1-12.

[122] Q. 27:15-44.

[123] For the connection between Sheba and the Sabæans, see: Kofoed, *Text and History*, p. 180; however, whilst the Kingdom of Sheba (i.e., *Saba'*) may have existed, doesn't necessarily lend credence to mythicised Biblical narrative regarding the Queen of Sheba; cf. e.g. Finkelstein & Silberman, *David and Solomon*, p. 171.

[124] Q. 34:15-16.

[125] Finkelstein & Silberman, *David and Solomon*, p. 171; hence, although aspects of the Quranic description of Sheba appear to be historically accurate, the Biblical "Queen of Sheba" narrative (which is recounted in the Quran) appears to be somewhat ahistorical.

[126] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Saba*', p. 665; *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Mārib*', pp. 563-564.

[127] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Mārib*', p. 562.

[128] Kassis, *Concordance*, p. 757; e.g.: Q. 7:85, 9:70, 11:84, 11:95, 20:40, 22:44, 28:22, 28:23, 28:45, 29:36.

[129] Q. 28:23-24.

[130] *E.Q.*, s.v. '*Midian*', p. 390.

[131] Kassis, *Concordance*, p. 289; e.g.: Q. 7:65, 7:74, 9:70, 11:50, 11:59, 11:60, 14:9, 22:42, 25:38, 26:123, 29:38, 38:12, 40:31, 41:13, 41:15, 46:21, 50:13, 51:41, 53:50, 54:18, 69:4, 69:6, 89:6.

[132] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Ād*', p. 169.

[133] Kassis, *Concordance*, pp. 1222-1223; e.g.: Q. 7:73, 9:70, 11:61, 11:68, 11:95, 14:9, 17:59, 22:42, 25:38, 26:141, 27:45, 29:38, 38:13, 40:31, 41:13, 41:17, 50:12, 51:43, 53:51, 54:23, 69:4, Q.69:5, 85:18, 89:9, 91:11.

[134] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*al-Hidjir*', p. 366; The Quran itself does not explicitly connect Hagra to Thamud, simply stating that the People of Hagra (*aṣḥāb al-Hijr*) hewed their homes from mountains (15:80-82). Despite this, the Quranic description of the architecture of Thamud (7:74-75) matches that attributed to Hagra, and it was recorded by Pliny (cited in *E.I.1*, s.v. '*Thamūd*', p. 736) that "Hegra" (i.e., *al-Hijr*) was one of the cities of the "Thamudæi" (i.e., *Ṭamūd*). Hence, even if Hagra and Thamud were disambiguated in the mind of the Quran-author, his citation of Hagra still fits the Quranic emphasis upon northwestern Arabia (where Hagra is located).

[135] *E.Q.*, s.v. '*Thamūd*', p. 253.

[136] Kassis, *Concordance*, p. 1050; e.g.: Q. 27:22, 34:15.

[137] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, viii, pp. 74-75, 687.

[138] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, ix, p. 42; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 482

[139] Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 23; similarly: Crone, '*What do we actually know about Mohammed?*' Open Democracy: https://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/mohammed_3866.jsp

[140] Robinson (*Discovering the Qur'an*, p. 58) contests Crone and Cook's argument, stating: "In 46:27, God speaks of his having destroyed cities 'around you' (Crone and Cook's emphasis). They take this to be a reference to the destruction of the peoples of Midian, Thamūd and 'Ād, all of whom lived in the north-west, far from Mecca. Two comments are in order. First, they fail to note that the Qur'ān also mentions South Arabian peoples who were punished by God, including Tubba' (44:37) and Saba' (34:15). Second, if the Quraysh travelled north and south with their merchandise it would surely be appropriate to speak of these peoples as having lived around them, even though they had not lived in the immediate vicinity of Mecca." There are several problems with Robinson's objections, however: firstly, Crone and Cook never denied that the Quran mentions paraphernalia from other regions of Arabia – instead, Crone and Cook's argument was that all of the "significant" former nations mentioned in the Quran were located in northwestern Arabia. Secondly, the south-Arabian nations of Tubba and Sheba are mentioned a total of 4 times altogether in the Quran, whereas the north-west-Arabian nations of Aad, Thamud, and Midian (discounting the Tanglewood People) are collectively mentioned 60 times – consequently, Crone and Cook (*Hagarism*, p. 23) were evidently correct when they stated: "All of the significant *umam khāliya* of the Arabian past are to be sought here: Midian, Thamūd and 'Ād." Thirdly, Robinson's second objection—"if the Quraysh travelled north and south with their merchandise it would surely be appropriate to speak of these peoples as having lived around them, even though they had not lived in the immediate vicinity of Mecca"—is unconvincing; when the Quran (46:27) informs its audience that God has destroyed the cities around them (*ahlaknā mā ḥawlakum mina al-qurā*), this simply indicates—*prima facie*—that the Quranic audience lives in close proximity to the ruins of past nations (presumably those mentioned in the Quran: Aad, Thamud, and Midian). To suggest that these ruined cities "around" the Quranic audience are "around" them in an abstract or greater sense is to impose a meaning or interpretation that isn't explicit on the wording of the text concerned. In essence, Robinson is presupposing that Muḥammad was located in southern Hijaz, and argues forthwith that this presupposition is compatible with Q. 46:27 if the Quranic text is taken in a more abstract or general sense. To make analogy: If a text stated that "the pyramids are around you", it would be easier to assume that the author means that his audience is in close proximity to the pyramids; to argue (in the same fashion as Robinson) that this statement indicates that some members of the audience sometimes pass by these pyramids in regions abroad (rather than the pyramids being close by) is to impose an interpretation that isn't self-evident in the given text. Hence, Robinson's counter-argument against Crone and Cook would seem unsatisfactory.

[141] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, viii, p. 231; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 422.

[142] Crone, *Meccan Trade*, pp. 163, 204; Cook, *Muhammad*, p. 70.

[143] Crone, *Meccan Trade*, p. 163.

[144] Crone, '*What do we actually know about Mohammed?*'

[145] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, vii, p. 517; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 383.

[146] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, p. 264.

[147] E.g.: al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 125; ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, vii, p. 518; not all commentators identified the 'nearest land' as Syria-Palestine, however; cf. Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 383.

[148] This suggestion was indicated by Crone and Cook (*Hagarism*, p. 23); cf. Robinson, *Discovering*, p. 58: "The other key āyah is 30.1, which mentions the defeat of the Byzantines 'in the nearest (part) of the land' (Crone and Cook's emphasis again). They assume that this refers to a Byzantine defeat in Palestine and thus very near to the supposed north-west Arabian sanctuary. The twelfth-century grammarian and Qur'ānic commentator, az-Zamakhsharī, gives two plausible interpretations of this ayah, both of which are compatible with its having been addressed to the Meccans when they were far from the scene of the battle in which the Byzantines were defeated by the Persians. In

az-Zamakhsharī's view, 'the land' may be 'the land of the Arabs', in which case what is meant is that the Byzantines have been vanquished in the part of the land of the Arabs nearest to them, namely the border of Syro-Palestine. Alternatively, 'the land' is 'their land', and what is meant is that the Byzantines have been vanquished in the part of their own land which is nearest to their enemies, namely Mesopotamia." Essentially, Robinson is appealing to the possibility of a generic or abstract interpretation of 'nearest land' relative to southern Hijaz; this interpretation presupposes the initial south-Hijaz provenance of Mecca, however, and works backwards from this assumption to harmonise the cited passage from the Quran (by recourse to metaphor or generalisation); if viewed without the imposed framework of Muslim historiography, Q. 30:2-4 simply implies *prima facie* that the author and audience of the text are situated immediately relative to this 'nearest land'. Consequently, the only question remaining is whether or not the 'nearest land' is meant in relation to the Romans themselves or to the author and audience of the Quran.

[149] Suggested by Robinson (*Discovering*, p. 58), citing az-Zamakhsharī: "Alternatively, 'the land' is 'their land', and what is meant is that the Byzantines have been vanquished in the part of their own land which is nearest to their enemies, namely Mesopotamia."

[150] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 107; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 47.

[151] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, p. 39.

[152] Bellamy, 'Seven Qur'ānic Emendations', in Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy*, pp. 30-31.

[153] Rendsburg, 'The Psalms as Hymns', in Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Temple*, p. 119; the Psalm (84:1-4) begins by praising the 'dwelling place' and the 'house' of God, i.e., the Temple of Jerusalem. The possible connection of this Baka to the Becca of the Quran is mentioned (and dismissed) by Leaman, ('Becca/Bakka', in Leaman (ed.), *The Qur'an*, p. 120).

[154] Book of Psalms (84:6) in the Bible (New International Version), online at BibleGateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+84%3A6&version=NIV>

[155] Book of Genesis (25:18) in the Bible (New International Version), online at BibleGateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+25%3A18&version=NIV>

[156] Genesis 25:18, Interlinear, online at BibleHub: <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/genesis/25-18.htm>

[157] E.g.: Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 22.

[158] Bellamy, 'Seven Qur'ānic Emendations', in Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy*, pp. 30-31.

[159] Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 22; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, p. 134

[160] Ptolemæus (trans. Stevenson), *The Geography*, v, p.129; Ptolemy provides a list of "the towns and villages in the interior" of Arabia Petræa, including a certain "Moca" (a Græcification of *Makka*). Due to Anglicisation, the Greek "k" often becomes the English "c" (e.g., *kyklops* to *cyclops*) – hence, the translation "Moca" by Stevenson is more-accurately "Moka".

[161] E.g.: ibn-Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, ix, p. 122; Suyūṭī & Maḥallī, *Tafsīr*, p. 492.

[162] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, p. 349; cf. *E.I.2*, s.v. 'Baṭn', p. 1102: "Used figuratively, *baṭn* "depression, basin" appears in geographical names."

[163] Crone, *Meccan Trade*, p. 136; similarly: *ibidem*, p. 137.

[164] *Ibidem*, pp. 196-198.

[165] Q. 14:37; probably the same sanctuary referred to in 3:96-97.

[166] Crone ('*How did the quranic pagans make a living*', p. 391) suggests that it is "the Quran itself that describes the Abrahamic sanctuary as located in an uncultivated valley (*wādin ghayr dhī zar'*) (14:37), just as it is the Quran itself that places the *mushrikūn* in a fertile setting." However, Crone (*ibidem*, p. 392) also suggests that "maybe the assumption here is that agriculture emerged later."

[167] Crone, '*How did the quranic pagans make a living*', p. 387.

[168] Q. 28:57.

[169] Cited in: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 565-566; for a more accurate translation (e.g., *Mahgraye* instead of anachronistic *Muslim*), see: Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 173.

[170] Robinson (*Discovering*, p. 55) counter-argues: "As for Jacob of Edessa, is it not likely that he had a lapse of memory which made him think that in his youth he had seen the Muslims in Egypt facing in the same direction as the Jews when praying?" This suggestion seems quite unlikely, however, given that Jacob spent many years in Egypt during his youth; according to Hoyland (*Seeing Islam*, p. 566): "Jacob had studied in Alexandria as a youth and so

would have been in a position to observe the Muslims there at first hand, which makes his testimony particularly valuable. His information about Syria is also likely to be accurate, for there were Muslims resident in Edessa while he was bishop of that town.”

[171] Cited in: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 561-562.

[172] Balāḡdurī, *The Origins*, i, p. 435; Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 173, n. 27; Crone, *Slaves*, p. 12; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 561.

[173] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 563.

[174] Cited in: Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 173, n. 28; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 563, n. 81; although initially attributed to Sāwirus ibn-al-Muqaffa' (c. 915-1000), it is now known that the earliest author of the *Siyar al-Bi'a al-Muqaddasa* was Mawhūb ibn-Manṣūr ibn-Mufarrij (d. c. 1100); see: 'Coptic and Ethiopic Writing', in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ii, p. 141.

[175] Balāḡdurī, *The Origins*, i, pp. 74-75:

[176] The contemporaneous observer Yōḥannān bar-Penkāyē (translated in: Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, p. 64) lived in Mesopotamia under the Zubayrid regime and wrote *circa* 687 that ibn-az-Zubayr “made it known about himself that he had come out of zeal for the House of God.” Yōḥannān (*ibidem*, p. 64) further noted that ibn-az-Zubayr viewed the Umayyads to be sinful “transgressors of the law,” in juxtaposition to his own piety and devotion to God.

[177] Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 173, n. 25.

[178] Hoyland (*Seeing Islam*, pp. 567-569) notes that after the aberration at Wasit, the mosques built by the Umayyads consistently pointed approximately towards south-Hijazian Mecca.

[179] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 568; Fehervari, *Development of the Miḥrāb*, i, pp. 89-90; Creswell, *A Short Account*, p. 41; Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 23-24.

[180] E.g.: Shoemaker, *The Death*, p. 226; cf. Robinson, *Discovering*, p. 55.

[181] E.g.: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 567-569.

[182] Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, p. 522, n. 33; the *qibla* of the Kufan Mosque was reorientated at some point during the Umayyad Era: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 562, n. 76.

[183] Cited in: Ṭabarī, *The History*, xxiv, p. 124.

[184] Cited in: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 568.

[185] Cited in: Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, p. 71, n. 40; Hawting, *The First Dynasty*, p. 69.

[186] Even if this report wasn't in relation to the *qibla*-change, the disapproval recorded by al-Jāḥiẓ *was*, not to mention the general censure recorded by aṭ-Ṭabarī and others concerning the destruction of the Ka'ba at the hands of al-Ḥajjāj; consequently, the following counter-argument by Robinson (*Discovering*, p. 55) is rendered moot: “The evidence adduced by Crone and Cook seems to imply that towards the end of the seventh century Mecca was still not recognized as the site of the true sanctuary. If this were the case, it is difficult to see how the authorities could subsequently have succeeded in imposing it, and in standardizing the direction of prayer, without there being widespread protest. There is, however, no trace of any such protest in the literature.”

[187] Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, pp. 424-425.

[188] For example, Crone ('*What do we actually know about Mohammed?*') noted: “It is difficult not to suspect that the tradition places the prophet's career in Mecca for the same reason that it insists that he was illiterate: the only way he could have acquired his knowledge of all the things that God had previously told the Jews and the Christians was by revelation from God himself. Mecca was virgin territory; it had neither Jewish nor Christian communities.”

[189] Serjeant, '*Haram and Ḥawṭah*', in Serjeant (ed.), *Studies in Arabian History and Civilisation*, p. 56.

[190] E.g.: al-Ya'qūbī (d. c. 905)—cited in: Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, pp. 100-101—reported that “Abd al-Malik built above the rock a dome and hung it around with curtains and brocade, and he instituted doorkeepers for the same, and the people took up the custom of circumambulating the rock, even as they had paced around the Ka'ba, and the usage continued thus all the remaining days of the Umayyads [from 692 to 750].” Similarly, the later Egyptian-Mamlukid chronicler ibn-Taḡrī-Birdī (d. 1470) claimed that 'Abd-al-Malik attempted to transfer the *qibla* from Mecca to Jerusalem: Fehervari, '*Art and Architecture*', in Holt *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ii, b, p. 704.

[191] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd*', pp. 523-524.

[192] *E.I.2*, s.v. '*Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr*', p. 55.

[193] *E.I.2*, s.v. 'Naḍīadāt', p. 859.

[194] *E.I.2*, s.v. 'Azāriḳā', pp. 810-811.

[195] Contrary to the suggestion by Robinson (*Discovering*, p. 55) that "it is difficult to see how the authorities could subsequently have succeeded in imposing" a new *qibla* and *ka'ba*.

[196] Q. 3:96-98.

[197] Q. 14:37.

[198] Q. 5:2, 5:97.

[199] Q. 5:97.

[200] Q. 27:91.

[201] Q. 5:2.

[202] Q. 2:196 (two passages later, a certain 'sacred monument' (*maš'ar al-ḥarām*) is also mentioned in relation to the pilgrimage); Q. 9:19.

[203] Q. 22:25-26.

[204] Q. 2:191, 5:2, 2:217, 8:34, 22:25, 48:25; cf. 48:27, which seems to indicate that the author has retaken the Sacred Temple, thereby fulfilling a prior prophecy.

[205] Q. 48:24; the subsequent passage connects this foe to the Sacred Mosque.

[206] Q. 2:144-150.

[207] Q. 2:191.

[208] Q. 9:1-10.

[209] Q. 9:7.

[210] Q. 9:28.

[211] Q. 17:1.

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