

**the city of Mecca**



**Mecca**

Mecca (/ˈmɛkə/) or Makkah (Arabic: مكة‎‎ Makkah [ˈmaka]) is a city in the Tihamah plain in Saudi Arabia[4] that is also the capital and administrative headquarters of the Makkah Region. The city is located 70 km (43 mi) inland from Jeddah in a narrow valley at a height of 277 m (909 ft) above sea level, and 340 kilometres (210 mi) south of Medina. Its resident population in 2012 was roughly 2 million, although visitors more than triple this number every year during the hajj ("pilgrimage") period held in the twelfth Muslim lunar month of Dhu al-Hijjah.

As the birthplace of Muhammad and the site of Muhammad's first revelation of the Quran (specifically, a cave 3 km (2 mi) from Mecca),[5][6] Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam[7] and a pilgrimage to it known as the Hajj is obligatory for all able Muslims. Mecca is home to the Kaaba, by majority description Islam's holiest site, as well as being the direction of Muslim prayer. Mecca was long ruled by Muhammad's descendants, the sharifs, acting either as independent rulers or as vassals to larger polities. It was conquered by Ibn Saud in 1925. In its modern period, Mecca has seen tremendous expansion in size and infrastructure, home to structures such as the Abraj Al Bait, also known as the Makkah Royal Clock Tower Hotel, the world's fourth tallest building and the building with the third largest amount of floor area. During this expansion, Mecca has lost some historical structures and archaeological sites, such as the Ajyad Fortress.[8] Today, more than 15 million Muslims visit Mecca annually, including several million during the few days of the Hajj.[9] As a result, Mecca has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Muslim world,[10] even though non-Muslims are prohibited from entering the city.

**Etymology and usage**

"Mecca" is the familiar form of the English transliteration for the Arabic name of the city, although the official transliteration used by the Saudi government is Makkah, which is closer to the Arabic pronunciation.[13][14] The word "Mecca" in English has come to be used to refer to any place that draws large numbers of people, and because of this some English speaking Muslims have come to regard the use of this spelling for the city as offensive.[13] The Saudi government adopted Makkah as the official spelling in the 1980s, but is not universally known or used worldwide.[13] The full official name is Makkah al-Mukarramah or Makkatu l-Mukarramah (مكة المكرمة, pronounced [makkah al mukarramah] or [makkatul mukarramah][clarification needed]), which means "Mecca the Honored", but is also loosely translated as "The Holy City of Mecca".

The ancient or early name for the site of Mecca is Bakkah (also transliterated Baca, Baka, Bakah, Bakka, Becca, Bekka, etc.).[15][16][17] An Arabic language word, its etymology, like that of Mecca, is obscure.[18] Widely believed to be a synonym for Mecca, it is said to be more specifically the early name for the valley located therein, while Muslim scholars generally use it to refer to the sacred area of the city that immediately surrounds and includes the Kaaba.

The form Bakkah is used for the name Mecca in the Quran in 3:96, while the form Mecca is used in 48:24.[18][20] In South Arabic, the language in use in the southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Muhammad, the b and m were interchangeable[citation needed]. Other references to Mecca in the Quran (6:92, 42:5) call it Umm al-Qurā (أم القرى), meaning "mother of all settlements."[20] Another name of Mecca is Tihamah.

Another name for Mecca, or the wilderness and mountains surrounding it, according to Arab and Islamic tradition, is Faran or Pharan, referring to the Desert of Paran mentioned in the Old Testament at Genesis 21:21.[22] Arab and Islamic tradition holds that the wilderness of Paran, broadly speaking, is the Tihamah and the site where Ishmael settled was Mecca.[22] Yaqut al-Hamawi, the 12th century Syrian geographer, wrote that Fārān was "an arabized Hebrew word, one of the names of Mecca mentioned in the Torah."

**Government**

Mecca is governed by the Municipality of Mecca, a municipal council of fourteen locally elected members headed by a mayor (called an Al-Amin) appointed by the Saudi government. As of May 2015, the mayor of the city was Dr. Osama bin Fadhel Al-Bar.

Mecca is the capital of the Makkah Region, which includes neighboring Jeddah. The provincial governor was prince Abdul Majeed bin Abdulaziz Al Saud from 2000 until his death in 2007.[26] On 16 May 2007, prince Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud was appointed as the new governor.

**History**

Early history

The early history of Mecca is still largely disputed, as there are no unambiguous references to it in ancient literature prior to the rise of Islam.[28] The Roman Empire took control of part of the Hejaz in 106 AD,[29] ruling cities such as Hegra (now known as Mada'in Saleh), located to the north of Mecca. Even though detailed descriptions were established of Western Arabia by Rome, such as by Procopius, there are no references of a pilgrimage and trading outpost such as Mecca.[30] The first direct mention of Mecca in external literature occurs in 741 AD in the Byzantine-Arab Chronicle, though here the author places it in Mesopotamia rather than the Hejaz]

Given the inhospitable environment and lack of historical references in Roman, Persian and Indian sources, historians including Patricia Crone and Tom Holland have cast doubt on the claim that Mecca was a major historical trading outpost.[31][32]

**Potential ancient references**

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus writes about Arabia in his work Bibliotheca historica, describing a holy shrine: "And a temple has been set up there, which is very holy and exceedingly revered by all Arabians".[33] Claims have been made this could be a reference to the Kaaba in Mecca. However, the geographic location Diodorus describes is located in northwest Arabia, around the area of Leuke Kome, closer to Petra and within the former Nabataean Kingdom and Rome's Arabia Petraea.[34][35]

Ptolemy lists the names of 50 cities in Arabia, one going by the name of "Macoraba". There has been speculation this is could be a reference to Mecca. However, due to the lack of a description or any other supporting literature, the claim is seen as contentious.

**Islamic view**

In the Islamic view, the beginnings of Mecca are attributed to Ishmael's descendants. The Old Testament chapter Psalm 84:3–6, and a mention of a pilgrimage at the Valley of Baca, that Muslims see as referring to the mentioning of Mecca as Bakkah in Quran Surah 3:96.

Some time in the 5th century, the Kaaba was a place of worship for the deities of Arabia's pagan tribes. Mecca's most important pagan deity was Hubal, which had been placed there by the ruling Quraysh tribe and remained until the 7th century.

In the Sharḥ al- Asāṭīr, a commentary on the Samaritan midrashic chronology of the Patriarchs, of unknown date but probably composed in the tenth century C.E., it is claimed that Mecca was built by the sons of Nebaioth, the eldest son of Ishmael.

In the 5th century, the Quraysh took control of Mecca, and became skilled merchants and traders. In the 6th century they joined the lucrative spice trade, since battles elsewhere were diverting trade routes from dangerous sea routes to more secure overland routes. The Byzantine Empire had previously controlled the Red Sea, but piracy had been increasing. Another previous route that ran through the Persian Gulf via the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was also being threatened by exploitations from the Sassanid Empire, and was being disrupted by the Lakhmids, the Ghassanids, and the Roman–Persian Wars. Mecca's prominence as a trading center also surpassed the cities of Petra and Palmyra.[42][43] The Sassanids however did not always pose a threat to Mecca, as in 575 CE they protected Mecca city from invasion by the Kingdom of Axum, led by its Christian leader Abraha.