Muslims point to a wealth of names and identifiers used for the city of Mecca in Islamic literature and they use this to object to my hypothesis that Petra is the original Holy City of Islam. In this paper I seek to answer this by exploring the various names and identifiers used for the city of Petra by different peoples and different times showing how similar they are with the Islamic names. Thus, Petra can be identified in the Qur’an, hadiths and histories with these names.

While the city of Mecca is mentioned only once in the Qur’an by name, the Qur’an uses a host of other identifiers such as: The Mother of All Settlements, The Noble City, or Blessed City, Becca, and the location of the Ka’ba, often called the Sacred House. The whole area around the city is called Masjid al Harām, or literally the forbidden gathering place for bowing down. In this paper we will compare the names used by Islamic sources for the city of Mecca with the names for Petra as found in the Petra Papyri (537 and 593 CE) and other early sources. (For the Petra Papyri I will borrow heavily from an article by Mohammed Nasarat and Sa’ad Twissi: The titles of Petra in the sixth century: the evidence from the Petra papyri, in Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy, 2017.)

שֵׂעִיר Seir

The Egyptian Amarna Letters mention a place called "Seir, in the land of Shasu" which most historians agree to be the mountains around Petra in Jordan. In the temple of Amenhotep III at Soleb (ca. 1380 BC) is listed Egyptian campaign accounts with the mountains of Petra being called "Pel", "Sela" or "Seir." (Grosby, 2007)

From the Bible we learn that Mount Seir (רֶישָׁי) was named for Seir the Horite, whose offspring had previously inhabited the area (Genesis 14:6, 36:20). The children of Esau (the Edomites) battled against the Horites and destroyed them (Deuteronomy 2:4-5, 12, 22). It is specifically noted that this is the place where Esau made his home. (Genesis 32:3; 33:14, 16; 36:8; Joshua 24:4). Later the prophet Balaam, predicting Israelite victories over the Trans-Jordanian nations at the end of their Exodus from Egypt, stated "Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession.” (Numbers 24:18)

Much later Mount Seir is also given as the location where the remnant "of the Amalekites that had escaped" were annihilated by five hundred men from the tribe of Simeon (I Chronicles 4:42-43). In 2 Chronicles 20:22-23, the "inhabitants of Mt Seir", united with the Ammonites and Moabites against Jehoshaphat of Judah. Mount Seir is also referenced in the prophetic books such as Isaiah 21:11 and
Ezekiel 25:8, 35:10. These references to the *remnant of the Amalekites* being at Petra are important as Al Ṣabārī (2:73) and others (for example see Mas‘udi, 1841:74-76) associate the Amalekites with the city of Mecca. As long as we understand “Mecca” to be in central Saudi Arabia, then this is highly unlikely, but if it is referring to Petra, then these and other sources may correctly attest to the presence of the Amalekites.

It is also possible that the name Dushara (The One of the Shara Mountains) is related to שֵׂעִיר the oldest name for the Petra mountains.

**Raqīm**

In the 2017 Autumn issue of the Journal of Semitic Studies there is an excellent article by Mehdy Shaddel. *(Journal of Semitic Studies, Volume 62, Issue 2, 1 October 2017, Pages 303–318; Studia Onomastica Coranica: al-Raqīm, Caput Nabataeae)* demonstrated that the original name for the Petra valley was *al-Raqīm*, the name of a very early king who lived in that area.

Shaddel traces this through funerary inscriptions, rabbinic writings, a letter attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, Syriac texts, a homily attributed to Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Book of the Laws of Countries* by Bardaiṣān of Edessa, the writings of Flavius Josephus, as well as Biblical texts. He also includes Yāqūt and other Arab writers of the first dozen centuries of Islam. The name Raqīm appears in the Qur’an as one of two miracles that the Lord had provided as evidence.

Mehdy Shaddel points out that in Sūra 18 verse 9 questions: “do you reckon the companions of the cave and of al-Raqīm to be among Our wondrous signs?” The location of the city of Raqīm, in a crevice between two mountains, filled with majestic carvings must have seemed to the listeners of the Qur’an to have indeed been a sign from God. However, many commentators on the Qur’an who did not know that Petra was associated with al-Raqīm wonder if it was the name of the dog that was with the seven sleepers.

**Selah**

*Selah* means "The Rock" in Hebrew. The root סֶלַע (sl') infers the meaning of cleave or split. (Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon 05554) In the Bible the term Selah is applied to a number of large prominent rocks,
such as *The Rock of Etam* (Selah Eytam in Judges 15:8, 15:11, *The Rock of Rimmon or Selah Remmowan* in Judges 20:45-47, and *The Rock of Mahlekoth* or Selah-hammahlekoth in 1 Samuel 23:28. These are large prominent rocks projecting out from the surrounding hills. The place where Ishmael was raised and finally buried at his death is called the *Hajr* or *Rock of Ishmael* as we will see later. (See Ibn Sa’ad vol 1, 1.8.14; Ṭabarī, vol. 2, p. 62-81, and Ibn Hishām 2) In Judges 1:36 the border of the Amorites is listed as going up to Ma’aleh ‘Aqrabbiym then to THE ROCK (Selah) and then going upward...” Here THE ROCK is not identified with anything else, and it is assumed the reader knows where it is.

Πέτρα Greek name for THE ROCK

An early historical reference to THE ROCK in Greek, was when the Greek Antigonids raided a Nabataean storage place in 312 BC. Diodorus Siculus (XIX, 940:95:1) speaks of the Nabataeans:

... But when the time draws near for the national gathering at which those who dwell round about are accustomed to meet, some to sell goods and others to purchase things that are needful to them, they travel to this meeting, leaving on a certain rock their possessions and their old men, also their women and their children. This place is exceedingly strong but unwalled, and it is distant two days’ journey from the settled country. After waiting for this season, Athenaeus set out for the rock with his army in light marching order. Covering the twenty-two hundred stades from the district of Idumæa in three days and the same number of nights, he escaped the attention of the Arabs and seized the rock at about midnight. On the next day, however, when he had advanced upon the rock, one of the barbarians called to him, saying: “King Demetrius,...” (Diodorus Siculus XIX, 940)

In the Greek language, THE ROCK is Πέτρα which refers to a large mass of rock. Strong’s Concordance identifies it as a feminine noun meaning "a mass of connected rock," which is distinct from Πέτρος which is "a detached stone or boulder." Souter defines it as a "solid or native rock, rising up through the earth" a huge mass of rock, such as a projecting cliff. In the masculine form, however it is a stone, such as a man might throw." (Zodhiates, 1992) Many of thought that this must refer to Petra, but modern historians believe it refers to Selah, near the Edomite capital. (discussed on the next page)

Petra

Pliny the Elder, writing about 70 CE mentions THE ROCK as Petra, the capital of the Nabataei and the center of their caravan trade. (*Natural History*, Pliny, Book 6:32). The Tabula Peutingeriana, a Roman road map of which the original is dated to the third century, marks Petra as an important site on the Via Nova Traiana. (Graf, 1978: 18) Under Constantine the city became the seat of a bishopric, and by the fifth century Petra was the administrative centre of the Byzantine province of Palaestina Tertia (Fiema, 1991:113). Although Petra’s wealth declined because of the redirection of trade goods via sea routes and the greater traffic on the northern land routes that now passed through Palmyra, it remained an important centre and a provincial capital (Watson, 2001:471).
There has been some discussion and disagreement whether THE ROCK in the Greek account of Antigonids refers to Petra, or to a large rock 50 km away, near the Edomite capital known as Basiyra (buṣayrā) today. (Also known as: Busheira, Bozrah, Botsra, or Botzrah in the past.) That rock is also known as The Rock, and is most likely the location mentioned in II Kings 14:7. In effect there were most likely two “Rocks” or Petras. Hence the Peutinger map, which is based on an archetype from the Roman imperial period, indicates Petrae (plural) east of the Arabah. (Retso, 2011) The first Selah is located at: 30°45'43.55"N 35°36'6.34"E was most likely the ROCK that Antigonids attacked in 312 BC., making the nearby city of Petra THE SECOND ROCK.

Above: The Rock Πέτρα (Petra) contains a city in a valley accessible through a crack in the rocks. Left: Selah, the Nabataean stronghold that Antigonids attacked. It is thought that this was the original Πέτρα before the Nabataeans developed the city of Petra. It contains fortifications, caves, waterworks, and several high places.
**Petra Hadriane**

The city of Petra also had a Roman name. The Roman Emperor, Hadrian, who visited Petra in 130 CE on his grand tour of the eastern Roman Empire, gave the city its most common name, *Petra Hadriane* (Lewis, 1989:489, 519). But while this name was used by many Roman historians, the city also had other names.

**Imperial Colony Antoniana**

From the Petra papyri, discovered in 1993 in a Byzantine church in Petra, we read that the city had numerous Byzantine names such as *Imperial Colony Antoniana*. (Nasarat, 2017) The papyri are the archives of a certain Theodoros son of Obodianos and his family who lived in Petra and its vicinity in the period between 537 and 593 AD. This would be during the period just before the prophet Muhammad was born, up until he was in his twenties. (Muhammad lived 570 - 632 AD) The records contain mainly economic and legal documents illustrating the life of a Nabataean Christian family in Petra and the neighboring areas. (Frösen, 2002: 6–9) (Nasarat, 2017)

It is interesting to note that honorific titles were used in Byzantine society to underline social standing and importance. For example, the use of ‘flavios’ before personal names was an indication of status. People used a host of honorific titles, some general, and some restricted to office holders and persons in important professions or of high social standing. For example, ‘most honorable’ (eudokimotatos), ‘most religious’ (theosebestatos), ‘most brilliant’ (lamprotatos), and ‘most pious’ (eulabestatos). (Koenen, 2003:253) Early Muslim writings also use honorific titles, especially for important places and events such as al-Madina al-Munawara, al-Qur'an, al-Karim, Karbala' al-Muqaddasa, Ramadan Karim, and many more.

**μητρόπολις Mother of Colonies**

It was probably Emperor Elagabalus (218 - 222 AD) who bestowed the title μητρόπολις or ‘Mother of Colonies’ on Petra. This honorific title for Petra is epigraphically attested in the third century CE but also occurs in the sixth-century Petra papyri. (Bowersock, 1971:234). The official term *colonia* is not found until the Roman Severan period (193 to 235 CE). At this time it was an honorific status given to established cities, and did not refer to settlement of new citizens, veterans or others. (Pollard, 2000:64) Eventually it became associated with the English term *metropolis*. A term very similar to this is used in the Qur'an, Mother of Settlements (أُمّ الْقُرَى) in Sura 6:92 and 42:5 where Muslims believe the Qur'an calls the city where Muhammad lived: *Umm al-Qura*, or the Mother of Settlements. (Nasarat: 2017) Note that the Qur'an clearly uses the term *اقْرَىَة* (امَّ الْقُرَى) which Lane identifies as *settlements* (Lane, p. 5331). It is common for modern translators to carelessly say “The Mother of All Cities” but the Qur'an specifically uses the term settlements, (*qura* قُرْى) and not cities (mudin مدن). Perhaps this word was chosen as it is closer to the Greek μητρόπολις.
Εὐγενής Blessed or Noble

The term *Mother of Colonies* as found in the Petra Papyri sometimes begins with the Greek word εὐγενής which in the 6th century was usually understood as ‘blessed’ or ‘noble.’ Around this time in the Christian world, the term εὐγενής was beginning to be used as “holy.” The use of this word would have been particularly significant because before the fifth century ‘holy’ would have been understood as ‘conspicuous’, whereas after the fifth century, during the Christian epoch, εὐγενής is usually assumed to mean ‘holy’. In the Petra papyri and elsewhere, the Greek term εὐαγής was being associated with great churches, and other buildings such as tombs and great civic buildings and structures. Hence, the exact meaning of the epithet ‘εὐαγής’ at this time remains uncertain. Neither ‘holy’ nor ‘noble’ nor ‘blessed’ would have been expected for a city (Frösen, 2002:30), and it is a very rare epithet for a Roman city (Koenen, 1996:184). The uniqueness of this term is significant, and it would seem that the residence at Petra were very proud of this special term. This resonates with the terms that the early Muslims applied to the city of Mecca: such as *Makkah al-Mukarramah* and *Becca al-Mubaraka* Sura 3:96.

Metropolis of Tertia Palaestina Salutaris

During the late fourth century Roman sources attest the presence of a province called *Palaestina Salutaris* that would have contained the city of Petra. (Nasarat, 2017) At the turn of the fifth century, the *Notitia Dignitatum* notes that the province *Palaestina Salutaris* was administrated by a praeses or provincial governor. (Ward 2008:90) In the fifth century, *Palaestina Salutaris* became known as *Palaestina Tertia* (Ward, 2008: 90). There has been considerable debate if and for how long Petra was the capital of this new province; at what point this function was established, and when was it transferred to the new capital, Bostra or Bosra in modern day Syria. However, in the Petra Papyri the city of Petra was also known as the Metropolis of Tertia Palaestina Salutaris. (Spijkerman, 1978: 240; Gagos & Frösen, 1998: 476).

A Divided City

From the Petra Papyri, some people have assumed that Petra was a Christianized city. After all, the papyri speak mostly of Christians. Other Byzantine writings speak of churches, a cathedral, and even a bishop, Asterius of Petra who was sent to the great church Council of Alexandria in 231 AD. However, it must be remembered that the Petra Papyri were found in a church. They were the records of only one family, that of Theodoros son of Obodianos, which date from 537 - 593 CE, the very years that traditional accounts tell us Muhammad was born. (571 CE). It is during this year that the attack of the elephant takes place (Sura al-Fīl). If Petra is the founding city of Islam, and if the traditional dates are correct then the attack of the elephant would have taken place during the time
that these legal records were written. But they are silent, as one might expect. The Petra Papyri are church legal records of an individual family, and not historical records of what is happening on a wider scale in the city.

And so we need to turn to the archeological record. This tells a slightly different story than the papyri. From a survey of buildings in Petra, it becomes obvious that the Christians occupied only one small sector of the city. All of the Christian churches, buildings and Christian tombs are located in one area. The rest of the city appears to have maintained its polytheist pagan identity.

In my book *Early Islamic Qiblas*, I traced out the pilgrimage route in Mecca in Saudi Arabia and then superimposed it over the Petra landscape to allow me to identify where the Islamic locations would have been. Most of the major Islamic pilgrimage locations in Petra can be easily identified this way. What is fascinating is that while the Christian sector of Petra was mostly in the north east corner of the city, the polytheists occupy most of the centre of the city, and the Islamic locations are mostly in the south of the city, except for the Ka’ba building, which I have identified in an earlier paper. (Four Ka’bas, 2018) The Polytheist, Muslim and Christian pilgrims would have used the grand processional way through the siq and down the colonnaded city street to the *Rock of Ishmael*, or to their respective places of worship. Due to the religious nature of the city, the name Blessed Mother of Settlements/Colonies seems to apply perfectly to this location.
It is not unusual for a city to be divided into various ethnic or religious quarters, where the events in one quarter are barely noticed in the others. So it is not surprising to read in the Islamic records that there was antagonism between the polytheists and the Romans. Now if the Romans and Byzantines had their own names for the city of Petra, then what names did the new fledging Muslim community use?

**Becca** - An Islamic name for Petra

In 2017 I published the book: *Early Islamic Qiblas*, with a survey of over 60 early mosques, revealing that that all of the mosques of the first century of Islam pointed to the ancient city of Petra. In 2018 I released a paper demonstrating that the foundation of the original Ka’ba still exists in Petra. Through these studies, it appears that the Petra valley was the focus of the qibla during the first one hundred years of Islam. If this is true, then Petra would be the original founding place of Islam, and the place where Hagar and Ishmael lived and died and a source of religious attention for both Christians and Muslims. In Islamic sources, this is known as the valley of Becca.

> “Behold, the first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Becca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples.” (Qur’ān 3:96) (emphasis mine)

As I demonstrate in the paper *Four Ka’bas*, (Gibson: 2018) the first Ka’ba was possibly located in the Petra valley in front of Qasr al-Bint. If this is true then the ancient name for the valley would have been Becca, or that of weeping. This valley has two mountains, which would have been known as Marwa and Ṣafa, which Hagar climbed in her search for water and people. This is then the valley where she wept for her child Ishmael, thinking he would die there. Thus it became known as Becca (place of weeping). All of the early descriptions of the Becca valley fit the Petra Valley, and this valley was the focus of the early Qibla. This connection is very important, as another name is used for the city in the valley of Becca in Islamic literature as we will see next.

**حافظ (Hijr)**

We read in Ṭabarî Vol 2.73: "Abraham directed Hagar and Ishmael to go to al-Hijr, and he settled them down there.” In Arabic the name Al Ḥijr has various meanings, but one important one is “The Rock.” (Lanes Lexicon, Part 2 of 8, pg 517) So here we have three names for The Rock: Selah in Hebrew, Petra in Greek, and Ḥijr in Arabic. However, since Petra was so soon forgotten, the meaning of al-Ḥajr evolved into other definitions.
Ṭabarī vol 2:16 tell us:

To Peleg b. Eber was born Reu, and to Reu Serug was born, and to Serug Nahor was born, and to Nahor was born Terah, whose name in Arabic is Āzar." To Terah was born Abraham. Arpachshad also had a son, Nimrod b. Arpachshad, whose dwelling was in the vicinity of al-Hajr.

From these references we learn that al-Hajr (Ḥijr) (The Rock) is the name of a location. Abraham sent Hagar to this location, which is identified as the place where she wept for Ishmael (Becca). As she lived there it also became the place where the first Ka’ba or House of Worship was set up by Abraham and Ishmael. It is near this valley that Abraham and his nephew Lot with his family lived. After Lot’s city was destroyed, Lot moved to near Zoar, about 80 km from present day Petra.

The Qur’an has an entire Sura dedicated to the place known as Al Ḣijr - Sura 15. This Sura points out that God only destroys cities when it is written that he should do so, because the people have not submitted (vs2-4). They mocked Gods messengers (v11) despite the signs given them. (v16) God gave them mountains, plants (v19), and rain (v22). Man was created by God but Satan (Iblis) refused to bow to him. (vs28-32). Then mankind rebelled. (vs40-52) so messengers were sent to evildoing people. (vs58) Some are delivered like Lot. (vs61-74) The ruined city still stands on an ancient road. Likewise, the “people of the wood” were also wrongdoers. (v78) The people of al-Ḥijr also rejected their messengers. (v80) They hewed homes from the mountains and felt secure (v82) but the blast (earthquake) took them in the morning. (v83) So turn away from the idolaters and be among those who submit. These major topics seem to speak directly to the city of Petra, demonstrating that the people had rejected God’s messengers and this was the reason they suffered from earthquakes.

Identifying al-Ḥijr as a name for the city of Petra will bring a host of objections. Traditionally Muslims have identified al-Ḥegrā in Saudi Arabia as al-Ḥijr so we need to try and understand how this identification came to be. Additionally, Muslims have traditionally identified the low half-circle stone wall at the front of the Ka’ba structure in Saudi Arabia as al-Ḥijr, so both of these identifications will be considered.

Ḥegrā
The ancient area known as Ḫegrā (sometimes called Egra) was the area where Obodas the leader of the Nabataeans was located, and is mentioned by early writers such as Strabo (ca.10 CE, Strabo 16.4.2) and Pliny the Elder (ca.60 CE, Pliny, 32.28). It was approximately 460km south-east of Petra and about 40 kilometers north of al-Ula in modern day Saudi Arabia. (GPS Coordinates: 26°46'50.85"N 37°57'12.16"E) The area was occupied by various groups over the centuries, but the greatest impact was made by the Nabataeans, who designated it as one of their burial locations. Like Petra, the entire area is filled with Nabataean tombs and accompanying dining halls. Sometime after
the Nabataean era, this great cemetery and accompanying residential area became identified as Al-
Ḥijr. During the Islamic period it also became known as Meda’in Saleh (مدايّن صالح, madā‘īn Ṣāliḥ) which is commonly translated “The cities of Saleh”

We have already associated the name al-Ḥijr with Abraham, Hagar, Ishmael, Becca, and the location of the first House of Prayer, which points us to Petra, the focal point of all of the first mosques in Islam. In order to understand the name Meda’in Saleh we must understand a little about the person of Saleh.

The story of Ṣāliḥ (صالح) is told in the Qur’an four times: 7:73-79, 11:61-68, 26:141-158, and 27:45-53. In these references the Qur’an gives us examples of those who refused to believe and submit to the messengers that God had sent. The list of messengers includes Noah, Hud, Saleh, Lot, Shuaib and finally Moses. Notice that this list is repeated four times in the Qur’an and is always in the same order. If this list is chronological, then all of these messengers existed before the time of Moses. It may also be that each of the events mentioned in the list all took place in the same geographical area.

The Qur’an speaks of places and events that are familiar to the audience, plus there are Hadiths that speak of this location, such as the Ark of Noah circling the Ka’ba area. The story of Lot takes place close to Petra. Moses brought the children of Israel near to the area as is attested by the Biblical record and also the presence of Aaron’s tomb just a few miles from Petra. If this is the case, the other messengers would have also been sent to those who occupied the Petra Mountains, such as the Edomites, Amalekites, and Midianites. In every case a messenger warns the people but they reject the messenger, and God brings judgment on them. In the same way, Muhammad is presented as another Warner to these same people.

In the Qur’an Noah is presented as the first Warner, who warned of a coming flood. When it happened Noah was established as an authentic messenger. The prophet Hud, who follows was a Warner, spoke to the people of ‘Ad which I attempted to establish as Petra in the book Qur’anic Geography. He is followed by Saleh who speaks to the people of Tham’ud in the greater Petra area. Then Lot becomes a Warner to Sodom and Ghomoroah, (67 km from Petra) and then Shuaib warns the nearby Midianites, who were also punished by an earthquake (7:90). Sura 11:94 describes the earthquake as a blast. Ṭabarī Vol 2:46 tells us that the Jews objected that Hud, Saleh, and Shuaib are not mentioned in the Jewish scriptures, so it seems that the Qur’an repeats the stories four times to answer the Jewish objections. In all four accounts, Saleh warns the people, and God punishes by an earthquake.
What is important here is that Saleh was sent to a city that suffered an earthquake. While earthquake destruction is evident in Petra (which has a long history of earthquakes) there is little evidence of major earthquake destruction in Ḥegrā in Saudi Arabia. The Ḥegrā area appears to have begun a gradual decline in the early 2nd century without a cataclysmic end, so how and why did the name Saleh become attached to Ḥegrā in Saudi Arabia? Perhaps this identification came from Sura 27:52 “Here are their homes, in ruins, on account of their iniquities. Surely in this is a sign for people who know.”

Ḥegrā is also known today as Mada’in Saleh. The term mada’in is a bit of a mystery. The Arabic word for “city” is madina, and the plural is mudin. But here we find the word mada’in seeming to mean cities. However, in Arabic the very same word could be created from a different root, and could mean the “place of a creditor or lender” from the root دان. Perhaps this is a harkening back to the days of Nabataean merchant trade.

When pilgrims passed by Ḥegrā on their way to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and wondered at the great tombs carved there, it is easy to see why they could associate this with the “ruined homes” mentioned in Saleh’s story in Sura 27. However, in Ḥegrā there are no homes to be seen. These have all been covered over by the sands of time. The Ḥegrā location was mostly a burial site, and not a great city. (See photo right and below.)

The photo left illustrates how Ḥegrā is not made out of a single projecting rock, but out of many scattered rocks in the desert. The wide spread tombs challenge the concept of this being a “city” destroyed by an earthquake, and so the identification of Mada’in Saleh with “the cities of Saleh” doesn’t seem appropriate.

Ḥijr Isma’il

As far back as there are Islamic records, the Ka’ba has been associated with al-Ḥijr. But there seems to be some confusion as to what exactly al-Ḥijr and the Rock of Ishmael refer to, and the meaning may have changed over the years.
First, the *Rock of Ishmael* might refer to the entire great rocky outcropping that contains the city of Petra. (See photo right) This would seem to fit the earliest use of al-Ḥijr when it is described as the place where Abraham brought Hagar to live. "Abraham directed Hagar and Ishmael to go to al-Ḥijr, and he settled them there.” (Ṭabarî Vol 2.73)

The word Ḥijr is also used to refer to space inside the small stone semi-circle wall (*hatīm*) in-front of the Ka’ba in Mecca. In the original Ka’ba in Petra, (see photo right) the *hatīm* wall seems to curve around an unseen object. Al Ṭabarî seems to refer to *hatīm* and Ḥijr as two separate entities. For example in Vol 6, pg 57 he describes the demolishing of the Ka’ba:

(They) divided the work on the Kabah between them. The side containing the door went to the Banu 'Abd Manaf and Zuhrah; the section between the Black Stone and the southern corner went to the Makhzum, Taym, and the clans of Quraysh who were attached to them; the back of the Kabah went to the Banu Jumah and Banu Sahm; and the side facing the Ḥijr and the Hatīm went to the Banu 'Abd al-Dar b. Qusayy.

If a memorial stone to Ishmael’s grave stood in the place where the wall would curve around it, then this sentence would make sense. The left wall of the Ka’ba in the photo above would face the Ḥijr and the Hatīm.

However, Bukhari, referring to a later time includes a hadith (5:187) that associated the Ḥijr and Hatīm in Mecca as the same thing:

*He who wants to perform the Tawaf around the Ka’ba should go behind Al-Ḥijr and do not call it Al-Hatim, for in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance if any man took an oath, he used to throw his whip, shoes or bow in it.*

12
The presence of a memorial stone to Ishmael seems to fit the following account. *Allah revealed to Ibrahim, may peace be on him, to erect the Ka'ba when he was one hundred years old and Isma'il was thirty years old, so he built it with him. Isma'il died after his father and was interred at al-Ḥijr close to the Ka`ba by the side of his mother Hajar.* (See Ibn Sa‘ad, 1.8.14. & Ṭabarī, 1:162, and Ibn Hisham 2) If we understand this account in light of the names discussed in this paper, then his account would seem to say: Ishmael was buried in *al-Ḥijr* (Petra) close to the Ka’ba.

This association of the two names might be explained by the changes that were made when the Black Rock was moved to Mecca and a new Ka’ba was built there in 65 AH. (Qur’anic Geography). When Ibn Zubayr moved the Black Rock and rebuilt the Ka’ba he combined the semi-circular wall into the Ka’ba structure itself, as seen in the photo to the right.

*In this year also, ‘abdallih b. al-Zubayr rebuilt al-Bayt al-Ḥarām incorporating the Ḥijr within it.* Ṭabarī Vol 20:176 (referring to year 65 AH)

By calling the area inside the curved wall *al-Ḥijr* (or *Hajr*) we can see how the word evolved to also mean a special space or a room.

If there originally was a memorial rock within the curved wall it would have long since been destroyed or removed when the Ka’ba was rebuilt in present day Mecca. This would explain the curve in the wall, as well as how the two terms became associated with one another.

And so over the years there has been confusion about where or what the term *al-Ḥijr* means. Based on my Qibla research with all the earliest mosques pointed to Petra, I proposed that *al-Ḥijr* originally referred to the great rock outcropping which eventually contained the city of Petra. Later it might have referred to a commemorative rock that stood near the Ka’ba, causing the wall curve around it. Later, when the Ka’ba was moved to what is now Saudi Arabia, the original meaning of *al-Ḥijr* was lost, so the term became associated with the space inside the curved *hatīm* wall. Since Petra was long...
forgotten, the references referring to a place called al-Ḥijr were eventually applied to the Nabataean burial area in Saudi Arabia, al-Ḥegrā.

**Mecca**

In my search for the names of Petra, I have come across one writer who calls the city of Petra by the name of Mecca. Thomas Artsruni, a contemporary of Al-Ṭabarī who, writing before his death in 887 CE tells us very clearly about the prophet Muhammad. After describing some of his activities and clearly mentioning that Mecca is in Petrea Arabia. He emphasizes that he is talking about “The Mecca” and associates the location with the Ammonites.

*At that time, in a place of Petrea Arabia Pharan, named Makka - The Mecca - he showed himself to brothers bandits, warriors and band chiefs, who were worshiping in a temple the idols of Ammonites, Samam and Kabar.* (Brosset, 1894, Livre II, 4. Pg 89)

In this account, the writer, Thomas Artsruni tells us that the prophet Muḥammad was not born and raised in Mecca in Saudi Arabia, but that he lived in a city called Mecca in the general area of Paran, in Arabia Petraea. Here the writer clearly calls it - the Mecca - and places it in southern Jordan, where the two Petras (Rocks) existed. If this is so, then Petra was also identified as “Mecca” at one time. The existence of two Meccas would certainly clear up the reason why Petra is continually referred to as Mecca in the Islamic accounts.

**Conclusion**

In the ancient records we can find at least six names that were given to the city of Petra in Jordan that can be attested as the names of Mecca in Islamic literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek and Hebrew Names for Petra</th>
<th>Arabic Names for Mecca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raqīm - Josephus</td>
<td>رقم al-Raqīm Sura 18:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μητρόπολις coloniae, Metropolis, Literally Mother of colonies/settlements</td>
<td>أم القرى Umm al-Qura - Mother of Settlements, Sura 6:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Πέτρα The Rock, Selah or Petra</td>
<td>الحجر al-Ḥijr - The Rock - Sura 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εὔγενής ‘noble’</td>
<td>المُكرَّمَة Mukarramah - Blessed or Noble City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בובה Becca - Ps 84:6</td>
<td>بكة Becca, Sura 3:96 Location of the “first” house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecca - Thomas Artsruni</td>
<td>مَکَہ Mecca used once in Sura 48:24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So when Islamic accounts speak of Mecca, are they referring to Petra in Jordan or Mecca in what is now modern day Saudi Arabia? Well, that depends on the year and the location of the Black Rock.

- Mecca referred to before 65 AH would most likely be Petra in Jordan
- Mecca referred to after 65 AH might have been either Petra in Jordan or Mecca in Saudi
- Mecca referred to after the earthquake of 128 AH would certainly have referred to Saudi Arabia.

I believe this article demonstrates that several of the names and terms that the Qur’an uses to describe Mecca the holy city of Islam have the same meaning as terms found in pre-Islamic Greek literature that describe the Holy City of Petra. Hopefully this will answer the objection that the name Petra never appears in the Qur’an.

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