Mecca and Macoraba*

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Abstract

Claudius Ptolemy's second-century Geography *places the name Macoraba in the west of the Arabian Peninsula. There is a consensus in Orientalist scholarship that Macoraba is Mecca, and to a lesser extent that the name derives from an Ancient South Arabian word for "temple." This paper traces the identification of Macoraba as Mecca back to Samuel Bochart in 1646 and assesses the changing interpretations of Macoraba since then. It concludes that no satisfactory derivation has been proposed to explain the difference between the names Mecca and Macoraba, and argues that the consensus should now be abandoned or more rigorously defended.*

> "Macoraba: 73° 20′ 22°."
> — Ptolemy, *Geography*, §6.7.[1]

Claudius Ptolemy was a Greek writer in Alexandria in the second century CE. He was the author of several works, the most influential being his astronomical *Almagest*; but his *Guide to Geography*, completed between 141 and 147 CE, would also prove highly influential in Europe and the Middle East. It consisted of a theoretical introduction, a list of notable places across the known world, and some accompanying maps. In order to preserve

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   1. Alfred Stückelberger and Gerd Graßhoff, eds., *Ptolemaios: Handbuch der Geographie*, 2 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 2006), vol. 2, 630–631. Previously the best Greek edition had been Karl Friedrich August Nobbe (ed.), *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* (Leipzig: Karl Tauchnitz, 1845), vol. 2 (of 3), 105.

the maps' accuracy when they were copied and recopied, Ptolemy gave coordinates for the place names, which he had calculated with some accuracy: a Ptolemaic map is distorted, but recognizable.

The exact sources for most sections of his *Geography* are an open question. He hinted at having travelled himself, but he must have compiled most of his information from earlier texts available to him in Alexandria. The town had long been the capital of a sophisticated Ptolemaic administration (305–30 BCE), which was then inherited by the Romans. It was also the leading center of Greek science in Ptolemy's day. It stands to reason that he should have had access to geographical data in the form of maps and accounts of trade routes, whether stored in archives or circulated in scientific works.[2] One such work was that of Marinus of Tyre, who is believed to have flourished between 107 and 114 CE, when Ptolemy himself was probably still a child. Consequently, Ptolemy's *Geography* may reproduce knowledge that was first available in Alexandria before his lifetime, and which may already have fallen out of date.

Ptolemy devotes a chapter to the western and southern regions of Arabia, which has long been exploited by students of pre-Islamic history: until the later twentieth century, historians relied overwhelmingly on foreign sources when tracking the rise and fall of towns, polities, religions and trade routes, since the peoples of ancient Arabia did not produce and preserve any comparable literature.[3] But if the Arabians were not literary, they were to some degree literate,[4] and in recent decades the intensive study of epigraphy—especially in the western half of the Peninsula—has greatly enriched our understanding of toponymy and political geography.[5] The task of integrating these native sources to the literary data is ongoing.

For the time being, many of Ptolemy's locations are still unknown or disputed. Others can be confidently identified, such as "Lathrippa," which is ancient Yathrib, present-day Medina. In the same chapter Ptolemy lists the name "Macoraba: 73° 20′ 22°," which he presents with no further comment. The coordinates would place it in the west of the Arabian Peninsula, either in or near the Hijaz, a mountainous belt along the Red Sea coast.[6] To the best of my

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2. His sparse biography is treated in Stückelberger and Graßhoff, *Handbuch*, vol. 1, 9–11.

3. On those foreign literary sources, see Michael C.A. Macdonald et al., "Arabs and Empires before the Sixth Century," in Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 11–89, 62–74.

4. Michael C.A. Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word," in id. (ed.), *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 5–28. Macdonald et al., "Arabs and Empires," 12–56.

5. See e.g. the broad view taken by Jérémie Schiettecatte and Mounir Arbach, "The Political Map of Arabia and the Middle East in the Third Century AD Revealed by a Sabaean Inscription," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 2 (2016), 176–196; and for the local scale, María del Carmen Hidalgo-Chacón Díez, "Place names in the Dadanitic inscriptions of al-ʿUdayb," *Adumatu* 30 (2014), 15–30.

6. Stückelberger and Graßhoff, *Handbuch*, vol. 2, 630–631. Greek Μακοράβα *Makoraba*, for which no manuscript variants are reported; transcribed into medieval and modern Latin as *Macoraba* and rarely *Machoraba*. I follow the English convention in using 'Macoraba', unless the Greek spelling is directly at issue.

knowledge, the name Macoraba has not been identified in the epigraphical texts.[7] No other ancient source records the name Macoraba.[8]

There is a consensus in academic scholarship that Macoraba is Mecca.[9] The coordinates put it roughly in the right place, and the name looks about half-right. Several etymologies have been proposed, but the preferred solution today is that it comes from an Ancient South Arabian word MKRB, meaning "temple."[10] It would follow that Macoraba was a noteworthy center of pre-Islamic religion as far back as the second century CE, if not sooner. Readers who encounter Macoraba in scholarly literature are quite likely to find this etymology, and extremely likely to find the identification with Mecca.[11]

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7. I am reasonably confident that if Macoraba had been identified in the epigraphic record, I would have found some reference to it in the course of researching this article. Current databases, though already useful and highly promising, are far from exhaustive; one could start by perusing the word lists at the University of Pisa's *Digital Archive for the Study of Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions*, dasi.humnet.unipi.it (consulted on 26.06.18) or by testing the searchable parameters of Oxford's *Safaitic Database Online,* http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd#bdrs (consulted on 26.06.18). I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad (Leiden) for guiding me to these resources.

8. There have been claims to the contrary. E.A. Belyaev did once confuse Ptolemy with Herodotus, which led Suliman Bashear to believe that Ptolemy and Herodotus had *both* mentioned Macoraba. On the other hand, Patricia Crone correctly located Macoraba in Ptolemy's *Geography*, but also called him Pliny by mistake, leading Aziz Al-Azmeh to faithfully misattribute Macoraba to Pliny. E.A. Belyaev, *Araby, Islam i Arabskij Khalifat v Rannee Srednevekov'e*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 96; tr. Adolphe Gourevitch, *Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Pall Mall, 1969), 87. Sulaymān Bashīr, *Muqaddimah fī al-Taʾrīkh al-Ākhar: naḥwa Qirāʾah Jadīdah li-al-Riwāyah al-Islāmiyyah* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1984), 110 and nn. 26–27. Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 136 n. 15. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 156.

9. Edward D.A. Hulmes s.v. "Mecca," in Ian Richard Netton (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 401: "Ptolemy... called the city *Macoraba*." Arent Jan Wensinck and Jacques Jomier s.v. "Mecca," in P.J. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2005): "Mecca... was apparently known to Ptolemy as Macoraba." Jacqueline Chabbi s.v. "Mecca," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 337–341, 337: Mecca and Bakkah "may well be derivations from a more complete rendering of the name, which would be recognized in the *Macoraba* mentioned by Ptolemy."

10. For the word itself, see Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 251–252. A.F.L. Beeston et al. (eds.), *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), 78. Stephen D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Rome: Editrice Pontifico Instituto Biblico, 1989), 87.

11. Stückelberger and Graßhoff, *Handbuch der Geographie*, vol. 2, 630–631, boldly translate the Greek "Makoraba" as "Makoraba/Mekka," and n. 111 provides the gloss "eigentlich 'Heiligtum,'" shrine. Isabel Toral-Niehoff, s.v. "Macoraba," in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden: Brill, 1996—), consulted online on 26.06.18: "According to Ptol. 6,7,32, city in north-western Arabia Felix, already at an early time equated with Mecca. Based on the southern Semitic root *mkrb* ('temple', 'sanctuary' but also 'altar')." Federico Corriente, *Dictionary of Arabic and Allied Loanwords* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 375 n. 885: "Apparently [Mecca is] an abridgement of Sar. *mkrb* 'sanctuary'... to judge from the Lt. form *Macoraba*." Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 32: "... the name Macoraba may be derived from the South Arabian *mikrab,* meaning 'temple', a name which would have been highly appropriate for a city which contained 'the inviolable place of worship'." But cf. 58, 304 n. 8. Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh through the Ten*

Consensus is not unanimity: there have been dissenting opinions.[12] The most prominent so far was from Patricia Crone in her seminal monograph *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam.* She evaluates Macoraba in a short survey of modern attempts to find Mecca in ancient literature.[13] Crone's conclusions are negative across the board: "The silence is striking and significant. It is so striking that attempts have been made to remedy it." In particular she concludes "that the name of Macoraba has nothing to do with that of Mecca, and that the location indicated by Ptolemy for Macoraba in no way dictates identification of the two."[14] We shall revisit Crone's specific arguments later.

Meccan Trade has had a strong impact on Early Islamic Studies, but Macoraba-as-Mecca remains a staple of academic writing on ancient Arabia. The reason, I will argue, is not that our interpretation is especially sound or explanatory, but that Macoraba has become so familiar that we do not think to reexamine it. It has been part of the discourse on Early Islamic Studies for a very long time. Crone responds to literature going back to the early twentieth century, but this article will show that the idea goes back as far as the mid-seventeenth. We shall proceed in the spirit of genealogy: by historicizing Orientalist scholarship on Macoraba, we may learn to see more clearly the roadmaps *and horizons* we have inherited.[15]

It should be declared at the outset that this research would have been all but impossible one or two decades ago. An extraordinary number of scholarly books and articles in Western languages from the sixteenth to the twentieth century have been digitized with optical character recognition, archived, searchable, and open-access. Many of the citations in this article may be followed, gratis, from a personal computer. Technology allows us to go far beyond previous surveys of the Macoraba problem. It also shapes our behavior as researchers, not always for the better. As a specialist in Early Islamic Studies, I do not claim expertise in the early modern sources I adduce; and while I try to situate the Macoraba problem in the broader trends of intellectual history, I trust that specialists in early Oriental Studies will find a great deal here to build on.

Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 12: "In the Ptolemaic corpus [Mecca] appeared under the orthography *Makoraba*, surely a Greek rendering of the Sabaean MKRB, ...signifying 'sanctuary'."

12. D.S. Margoliouth s.v. "Mecca," in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 511–514, 511: "The classical geographers, who devote considerable attention to Arabia, are apparently not acquainted with this settlement; for the Makoraba of Ptolemy (VI. vii. 32) is derived from a different root." It is not clear that Margoliouth had engaged with the arguments collected in this paper. In any case, his objection was approvingly cited by Ibn al-Rawandi (ps.), "Origins of Islam: a Critical Look at the Sources," in Ibn Warraq (ps., ed.), *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2000), 89–124, 98; who also recapitulated Crone, below.

13. Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 134–136.

14. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 136.

15. Mark Bevir, "What is Genealogy?," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2008) 263–275. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire," in Suzanne Bachelard (ed.), *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 145–172.

Where was Macoraba?

If we suppose that Macoraba is Mecca, there is a slight problem with its coordinates. Ptolemy puts it southeast of Yathrib; Mecca is southwest. In 1799 the historical geographer Konrad Mannert noticed that Macoraba was too far from the coast; he speculated that Ptolemy's sources knew Mecca from the overland caravan route, and had never approached the town from the sea.[16] Even this solution may be too elaborate, because in general it seems that Ptolemy had more trouble calculating longitude than latitude, meaning that his towns are more accurately positioned north-south than east-west.

This had decisive consequences for his geography of Arabia. Dumat al-Jandal (*Dumaitha*) is indeed further north than Tayma (*Thaima*), which is further north than al-Hijr (*Egra*), Yathrib (*Lathrippa*), and Najran (*Nagara*); but then Ptolemy puts Najran too far east, in the middle of the Peninsula. The overall effect is to push towns away from the coast, crowding the heart of the Peninsula and practically erasing the Empty Quarter of harsh desert in the southeast.[17] Under these constraints, Macoraba's location with respect to Mecca may be considered within a margin of error.[18]

This is encouraging. In contrast, some other ancient names and places that have been associated with Mecca are more easily located in other parts of the Peninsula: up in the region of the Sinai and the Gulf of Aqabah, or down by Oman and the Yemen.[19] Macoraba has the virtue of at least being placed in (or near) the Hijaz. But we should be cautious. This margin of error is not itself evidence that Macoraba is Mecca; it merely opens the door for investigation. We should heed Patricia Crone's counsel: Ptolemy's coordinates "are inexact; but if they are inexact, one cannot identify places on the basis of them alone."[20]

The problem remains that Macoraba (*Makoraba*) and Mecca (*Makkah*) are different words. If we see Mecca in the first half of Macoraba, then we need to explain the second half; if Mecca is an abbreviation of Macoraba, then we should ideally want to explain how that came about; and if Macoraba is an epithet for Mecca, that too demands an explanation. Indeed, there is a long tradition of incompatible attempts to bridge the two names.

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16. Konrad Mannert, *Geographie der Griechen und Römer*, vol. 6 part 1 (Nuremberg: Ernst Christoph Grattenauer, 1799), 113. As we shall see, Edward Gibbon was among those who have identified Mecca with Macoraba; but one of his editors would later anonymously object that "the situations do not agree." Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 442 n.

17. Hugh Kennedy, "Arabia According to Ptolemy," in id. (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), consulted online on 26.06.18.

18. Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 32, observes that Macoraba is "about the right distance from Yathrippa for it to be Mecca, but too far east and hence too far inland. Nevertheless, in view of other distortions in Ptolemy's cartography, this was probably simply an error on his part."

19. We shall encounter these below.

20. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 136 n. 15. Crone names Pliny, which is a typographical error: it is clear from the previous sentences that Ptolemy's coordinates are at issue.

Macoraba and the Medieval Geographers

Our investigation should begin with early Muslim literature. Since the medieval scholars often made reference to Ptolemy, and since they took a great interest in the history and geography of Arabia, we might expect them to have commented on Macoraba. This does not seem to have been the case. To my knowledge, earlier studies have not adduced a single medieval text that calls Macoraba by name, and I have encountered none myself.[21] The Arabic geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) does quote Ptolemy on the location of Mecca, which should tell us whether or not he identifies it with Macoraba. Strangely, though, the coordinates he attributes to Ptolemy (78° 23°) do not line up with Macoraba (73° 20′ 22°), or with anything else in his *Geography*, and they would put Mecca even further east than Ptolemy puts Macoraba.[22] Meanwhile Yāqūt has no entry for a place called Macoraba.

It is unlikely that Yāqūt and his colleagues had access to the *Geography* itself, even in translation. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, writing in the later tenth century, the scholars of Baghdad did produce Arabic translations of the *Geography*;[23] but these works are lost, and they could easily have been adaptations rather than faithful renditions. Ibn Khurdādhbih (d. 300/912) claims to have translated something of Ptolemy's, possibly the *Geography*, as a precursor to his own study on *Roads and Kingdoms*;[24] but again the translation is lost, while the only detail that he specifically attributes to Ptolemy—that there are 4,200 towns in the known world—does not appear in the *Geography*.[25] To make matters worse, variants of this fact in other medieval works do not seem to link it with Ptolemy.[26]

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21. In addition to the works cited below, see the section on Mecca by al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897), ed. T.J.G. Juynboll, *Kitābo' l-Boldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1861), 99–103.

22. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (ed.), *Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch* [*Muʿjam al-Buldān*], vol. 4 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1869), 616, s.v. "Makkah." For the origins of this datum in a so-called *Malḥamah* named for Ptolemy, see Fuat Sezgin, *Mathermatical Geography and Cartography in Islam and their Continuation in the Occident*, vol. 4, *Authors* (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arab-Islamic Science, 2011), 197–198; but there seems to be a mistake in the table comparing the *Malḥamah* with the *Geography*, because the coordinates for Mecca are given as 7**3**° 23° rather than 7**8**° 23°.

23. Gustav Flügel (ed.), *Kitâb al-Fihrist* (Leipzig: F.C.W. Voegel, 1872), 268: "Al-Kindī [fl. *ca* 235/850] made a poor translation, then Thābit [ibn Qurrah, d. 288/901] made a good translation of it into Arabic."

24. M.J. de Goeje (ed.), *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. 6, *Kitâb al-Masâlik wa'l-Mamâlik* (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 3 (Arabic) = 1 (French).

25. Id., 5 (Arabic) = 3 (French); previously noted by V.V. Barthold, tr. V. Minorsky, *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam* (London: Luzac, 1939), 14. For Ibn Khurdādhbih's substantial comments on Mecca, bearing no trace of influence from Macoraba, see (Arabic) 125–35, 185–93 = (French) 96–103, 145–151.

26. Yāqūt puts the number of towns in the northern world at 4,000, but his sources are left strikingly vague: "some say," "it is said." Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (ed.), *Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch* [*Muʿjam al-Buldān*], vol. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866), 17. The number 4,530 appears in the *Meadows of Gold* by al-Masʿūdī, on the authority of a certain philosopher's *Jughrāfiyā*, but al-Masʿūdī's description of this book does not very much resemble Ptolemy's *Geography* as we know it. C. Barbier de Maynard and Pavet de Courteille (eds. and trs.), *Les prairies d'or* [*Murūj al-Dhahab*], vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1861), 183–185. Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography*, 204, has "no doubt" that this source was the *Ṣūrah* commissioned by al-Maʾmūn. Alternatively, J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48, suggest that the "philosopher" might have been Marinus of Tyre.

Ptolemy's findings were extensively adapted for new Arabic compositions and his authority was invoked, rightly or wrongly, to ground the science in ancient knowledge. For want of a common source text, material was easily lost or misattributed.[27] An egregious case would be Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 456/1064) assertion that Ptolemy had written about Gog and Magog in his *Geography* and measured out their domain beyond the great wall.[28] The medieval scholars seem to have known that misattribution was a problem: Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 370s/980s?) complains about a source that ascribes patently false information to Ptolemy.[29]

Beyond misattribution, the loss or substitution of Ptolemaic data may represent advances made, independently, by the medieval geographers: al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), for one, believed the great map commissioned by al-Maʾmūn (r. 197–218/813–33) was an improvement on the previous works by Ptolemy, Marinus and others.[30] Whatever has survived of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the medieval literature, it has surely been mediated through a sequence of adaptations. The earliest surviving example of such an adaptation is the *Geography* of al-Khwārizmī (d. after 232/847), probably also composed in the reign of al-Maʾmūn. Even he does not seem to know Macoraba by name or by Ptolemy's coordinates, and he puts Mecca at 67° 21°,[31] as do some later geographers.[32]

Orientalist scholarship has long recognized that the coordinates given for Mecca by the medieval geographers do not correspond with Ptolemy's for Macoraba.[33] The nearest we have is the use of latitude 22° for Mecca by Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib (d. after 255/869)[34] and

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27. To better understand how misattribution comes about, cf. a study of misattribution in the Arabic historical tradition by Ella Landau-Tasseron, "On the Reconstruction of Lost Sources," *Al-Qanṭara* 1 (2004), 45–91, esp. 48–57.

28. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣr and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayrah (eds.), *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa-al-Ahwāʾ wa-al-Naḥil*, 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Buḥayl, 1996), vol. 1, 206.

29. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1992), 22: "I have read in a text other than the *Geography* that, according to Ptolemy, [the Caspian Sea] draws on the Mediterranean; but heaven forefend that someone like Ptolemy should say something preposterous or describe something differently from how it is." His substantial comments on Mecca, which cannot be related to Macoraba, are on 30, 35–37.

30. M.J. de Goeje (ed.), *Kitāb al-Tanbīh waʾl-Ishrāf* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), 33. The translation by B. Carra de Vaux, *Le livre de l'avertissement et de la révision* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1897), 53, understands this to mean that it surpassed them *in beauty*, but I concur with Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography*, 204.

31. Hans von Mžik, *Das Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ des Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Mūsā al-Ḥuwārizmī* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1926), 10.

32. David A. King, "Al-Bazdawī on the Qibla in Early Islamic Transoxania," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science*, 7 (1983), 3–38, 16.

33. Carlo Alfonso Nallino, *Al-Battānī sive Albatenii Opus Astronomicum* (Milan: Reale Osservatorio di Brera, 1899–1907), vol. 2, 37–38, §103.

34. Reported in brief by Marie-Thérèse Debarnot, "The *Zīj* of Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib: a survey of MS Istanbul Yeni Cami 784/2," in David King and George Saliba (eds.), *From Deferent to Equant: A Volume of Studies in the History of Science in the Ancient and Medieval Near East in honor of E.S. Kennedy*, (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1987), 35–69, 49. My thanks go to Sean W. Anthony (Ohio State) for bringing this to my attention.

Abū al-Wafāʾ al-Būzjānī (d. 387/998).[35] These two early geographers use the same latitude for Mecca as Ptolemy does for Macoraba. On the other hand, they do not call Macoraba by name, and their longitudes differ from Ptolemy's. We should allow the possibility that they arrived at 22° independently, just as others arrived at 21°, 21° 40′, 23°, or 23° 20′.[36] Ḥabash himself is associated with different numbers in that range: he reports a latitude of "approximately" 21° 42′ calculated by al-Maʾmūn's scientists, and in turn, he is named as an authority for 21°.[37] The fact that (very few) medieval geographers put Mecca on the latitude where Ptolemy puts Macoraba should tell us no more than we already knew: the two places are not very distant. In itself, that is no reason to think that medieval scholars ever recognized them as the same place.

On the contrary, neither Macoraba's name nor its coordinates have been securely identified in the medieval literature: it is entirely possible that Macoraba was omitted from the Ptolemaic tradition that the Muslim scholars inherited (perhaps through Syriac). It is also possible that they saw Macoraba in the data, found no significance in the name, and discarded it. As we shall see, the identification of Macoraba with Mecca is a modern hypothesis: it is an idea with a history. We should not take for granted that premodern Muslim scholars read Macoraba the way Orientalists have read it.

There is another possibility, which invites further research. Medieval geographers may have tried to correct Ptolemy's perceived errors by converting groups of his coordinates according to a regular formula. It is therefore conceivable that Macoraba will eventually be recovered from the medieval data. I am not competent to investigate this; those who wish to identify Macoraba with Mecca—at least in the medieval literature—might help their case if they start to address such problems. The arguments that *have* been made for Macoraba-as-Mecca are not mathematical but philological, and they were first articulated in Western Europe.

The Search for Ancient Mecca

By the fourteenth century, historical geography had become a major preoccupation of the Western humanists. Their method was antiquarian but critical: geographical data from disparate periods were collated, tested and synthesized. The humanists practiced cartography and published the results of their comparative toponymy in gazetteers and

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35. A fragment attributed to him in the anonymous *Dustūr al-Munajjimīn*, MS Paris BN Ar. 5968, ff. 63b–64b, on f. 64a l. 2. Photographs in E.S. Kennedy, "Applied Mathematics in the Tenth Century: Abū ʾl-Wafāʾ calculates the distance Baghdad–Mecca," *Historia Mathematica* 11 (1984), 193–206, 195–197, and commentary on 200.

36. 21° 40′ is the commonest latitude reproduced by the medieval geographers. King, "Al-Bazdawī on the Qibla," 16, 19, 24 n. 3. As for 23° 20′, al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945?) attributes this datum to al-Fazārī, who wrote in the late 8th century. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Akwaʿ al-Ḥawlī (ed.), *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab* (Sanaa: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1410/1990), 82; cf. Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography*, 4:201–203. The other estimates we have encountered already.

37. The former in his *Kitāb al-Ajrām wa-al-Abʿād*. Y. Tzvi Langermann, "The Book of Bodies and Distances of Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib," *Centaurus* 28 (1985), 108–128, 116 (Arabic) = 123 (English), §10. The latter by al-Hamdānī, ed. al-Ḥawlī, *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, 82.

concordances.[38] These findings were further developed over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Western thought underwent a "spatial turn," propelled by complex forces.

At home, states were increasingly territorialized; abroad, Westerners practiced empire and trade across unfamiliar regions. The Age of Exploration and the rise of a new eastern power, the Ottomans, revived a general interest in travel literature. Printing technology made cartography a cheaper, more exact science. The Americas posed a challenge to biblical accounts of human migration, even as the Reformation posed a hermeneutic challenge to scripture as a whole. Theories and techniques for understanding space were now more intensely debated. The historical geography of humanism was fed into this crucible to forge the early modern genres of cosmography and sacred geography: Roman, biblical and contemporary sources were combined to fashion a world with global breadth and historical depth.[39] Arabia, which was known to both Roman and biblical sources, was among the regions at stake.

In this far-reaching process of spatial revision, Ptolemy's *Geography* had a special role: being a huge index of places and peoples, its value for historical geographers was unsurpassed. It was available to Western scholarship after 1397, when a Byzantine diplomat moved to Florence to teach Greek to the humanist community, bringing a copy with him. The first Latin translation was completed as early as 1409; in the latter half of that century sumptuous manuscripts of Latin translation circulated in princely libraries.[40] The first printed translation was published in Vicenza in 1475, and the first printed edition of the original Greek came out of Basel in 1533.[41] And from the 1530s onward, Ptolemy's *Geography* was involved in a well-recorded, evolving discussion over the identification of Mecca in ancient sources.

The humanists were not the first to seek Mecca in ancient sources. It was a matter of biblical exegesis from early in the history of Islam. Despite their competing theologies, medieval scholars often agreed that Mecca was Paran, the desert where Abraham had sent Ishmael to live (Genesis 21).[42] Certain rabbis argued instead that Mecca was Mesha, settled

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38. George Tolias, "Ptolemy's *Geography* and Early Modern Antiquarian Practices," in Zhur Shalev and Charles Burnett (eds.), *Ptolemy's* Geography *in the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 2011), 121–142.

39. For the 'spatial turn' in depth, see Zhur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), ch. 1, "Early Modern Geographia Sacra: Themes and Approaches," 1–22.

40. Zhur Shalev, "Main Themes in the study of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance," in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's* Geography *in the Renaissance*, 1–14.

41. Desiderius Erasmus (ed.), *De Geographia Libri Octo* (Basel: Froben, 1533); Macoraba on 392.

42. Paran is identified as Mecca in two early Armenian sources: a *Geography* attributed to Ananias, whose recensions may even date to the seventh century, and the *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, composed in the late ninth century. Robert H. Hewsen (tr.), *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (ašxarhac'oyc'): The Long and Short Recensions* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1992), 70–71, 70A–71A; and Hewsen's comments on dating the work, 1–35. No ed., *Patmut'iwn Tann Artsruniats'* (Konstandnupōlis, Hōrt'agiwł: Pōłosi Arapean Apuch'ekhts'woy, 1852) 109, 111–112 = Marie-Félicité Brosset (tr.), *Collection d'historiens Arméniens*, vol. 1 (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1874), 89–90. Examples of Muslim commentary are noted by Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 159, 268–270.

by the descendants of Joktan (Genesis 10).[43] Ishmael and Joktan were both considered Arabian patriarchs. Western scholars inherited these arguments and went on debating their merits into the eighteenth century; but significantly, they also conferred with Roman and contemporary geographies. Ptolemy was a common reference. Critics argued, for example, that Mesha was Muza, which Ptolemy had placed on the Red Sea coast, or that Paran was Pharan, which Ptolemy had placed in the Sinai. Such towns could not be identified with Mecca.[44]

Literary humanism was clearing the way for more innovative research, as Greek and Latin texts were recovered, revisited and recentered; discussions about ancient Mecca were no longer so dependent on the Bible and parabiblical literatures. To be sure, these remained important sources, but starting in the 1530s there were cumulative and lasting efforts to find Mecca in Roman sources. Ancient geographers, especially Ptolemy, helped Western scholars to sharpen the dimensions of the Arabian Peninsula, while the "spatial turn" compiled names from different epochs into cohesive maps and gazetteers. Hypotheses could now be checked against more variables, so that arguments became slowly more sophisticated. This is not the place to explore these developments in detail, but we should take note of the major hypotheses, to sketch out the kind of discourse that proved able to identify Macoraba with Mecca.

As early as 1535 a translation of Ptolemy sported a marginal note equating Mecca with Pharan, in accordance with the medieval argument that Mecca was biblical Paran.[45] On the same page, the nearby region of Munychiatis was identified as Medina, perhaps on the assumption that Medina should be close to Mecca. It seems as though the editors had no real sense of where these towns were, but were trying to shore up their own frail knowledge with authoritative reports from Ptolemy and the Pentateuch. Indeed, many writers confused Medina with Mecca, so ultimately Munychiatis became identified with Mecca as well.[46]

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43. Saadia Gaon (10ᵗʰ century), ed. and tr. Joseph Derenbourg, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, *Version Arabe du Pentateuque* (Paris: Ernest Leroux 1893), 17. David Qimḥi (13ᵗʰ century), ed. Abraham Kohn, *Comentar zur Genesis von Rabbi David Kimchi* [*Perush Radaq 'al ha-Torah... Sefer Be-Reshit*] (Pressburg/Bratislava: Abraham Ginzburg, 1842), 33b. Abraham Zacuto (15ᵗʰ century), *Sefer Yuḥasin* (Cracow: Isaac ben Aaron Prostitz, 1580), 135b.

44. Against Paran: Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture* (London: William Rogers, 1697), 159–60. Against Mesha: Samuel Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, vol. 1, *Phaleg seu de Dispersione Gentium et Terrarum*, etc. (Caen: Petrus Cardonellus [Pierre de Cardonnel], 1646), 360, cf. 164; Johann David Michaelis, *Spicilegium Geographiae Hebraeorum Exterae, post Bochartum*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Anna Vandenhoeck, 1780), 211–212.

45. "Phara" is at the bottom of the first column, and by the top of the second column is the note "Mecha Mahumeto sacra domus." Willibald Pirckheimer (tr.), *Clavdii Ptolemaei Alexandrini Geographicae Enarrationis* (Lyons: Melchior Trechsel and Gaspar Trechsel, 1535), 98. Due to this misalignment, the uninformed reader may have understood that Mecca was the town immediately next to the note: Elana, modern Aqabah! Indeed, this mistake was affirmed by a later edition, where the marginal note was written into the main body in italics, under not Pharan but Elana: Sebastian Münster (ed.), *Geographia Universalis, Vetus et Nova* (Basel: Heinrich Petrus, 1545), 103.

46. Jean Nicot (ed.), *Thresor de la Language Francoyse*, vol. 3 (Paris: David Douceur, 1607), 112: "Munychiates, a town of Arabia Petræa, today Medinath Alnabi, where [there is] Mahomet's tomb, Mecha." Thomas Herbert,

A very different approach was tried in 1553 by the French traveler Pierre Belon: he identified Mecca with Petra on the grounds that both were meant to have been entrepôts on the spice trade.[47] Petra was known from ancient geographers, including Ptolemy, but not from the Bible. This hypothesis had its supporters, but in the long run Petra was ruled out because it was found to be in the wrong area. In the classical schema, Petra was part of Arabia Petraea, comprising the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Aqabah; on the other hand Mecca was (correctly) understood to be in Arabia Felix, comprising the western and southern reaches of the Arabian Peninsula.[48] The same calculation may have worked against Pharan and Munychiatis.

Within Arabia Felix, then, in 1557 a Venetian geographer proposed that Mecca was ancient Mochura. Unlike Pharan and Petra, this also sounds a bit like Mecca.[49] The same consideration will surely have been given to Mariaba, proposed by a French geographer in 1670.[50] Meanwhile, in 1660, a Swiss Orientalist proposed that a people in Arabia Felix called the Macae were in fact the ancient Meccans.[51] These toponyms were all drawn from Roman geographers, and all could be found in Ptolemy. Their hypotheses were quite sophisticated: they sought Mecca in the right classical subdivision of Arabia, and they assumed, not unreasonably, that Mecca should have had a similar name in the centuries before Islam. The same confluence of location and morphology yielded the Macoraba hypothesis in 1646.

On closer inspection, none of these proposals entirely suits the location of Mecca. The Macae were in southeastern Arabia, opposite Carmania.[52] Mariaba was in the Yemen, probably to be identified with Marʾib.[53] Ptolemy places Mochura north and Macoraba

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Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique, revised ed. (London: Jacob Blome and Richard Bishop, 1638), 252: "...Mecca (Mocura and Munychiates in old writers, the Arabian Metropolis)."

47. Pierre Belon (Bellonius), *Les Observations de Plusieurs Singularitez* (Paris: Gilles Corrozet, 1553), 111, 121. In the 1554 edition: 111, 120, 171.

48. Giovanni Antonio Magini, *Geographiae Universae* (Venice: Simone Galignani de Karera, 1596), 273. The exact location of Petra in northern Arabia was only discerned centuries later. In our time the identification of Mecca with Petra has been revived outside academic scholarship, notably by Dan Gibson, *Qurʾānic Geography* (Saskatoon: Independent Scholars Press, Canada, 2011). The context for this identification is however radically different, informed by the skeptical turn in academic Early Islamic Studies since the later 20th century. Historiography has not simply repeated itself, though it has rhymed. Gibson's book is sharply discredited by David A. King, "From Petra back to Makka—From 'Pibla' back to Qibla," published at http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/from-petra-back-to-makka (consulted on 08.11.18).

49. Dominicus Marius Niger, *Geographiæ Commentariorum libri XI* (Basil: Henricus Petrus, 1557), 547–548.

50. Philippus Ferraris Alexandrinus, ed. Michael Antonius Baudrand, *Lexicon Geographicum* (Paris: Franciscus Muguet, 1670), vol. 1, 459, 468. Michael Antonius Baudrand, *Geographia Ordine Litterarum Disposita*, vol. 1 (Paris: Stephanus Michalet, 1682), 625, 636, 660. Even if Baudrand did not invent this identification, he was apparently the first to publish it.

51. Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis: quae, ex Variis Orientalium Monumentis Collecta* (Zürich: Johann Jacob Bodmer, 1660), 213. This was proposed again by Guillaume Dye, "Le Coran et son contexte: remarques sur un ouvrage récent," *Oriens Christianus* 95 (2011), 247–270, 250 n. 10.

52. Isabel Toral-Niehoff s.v. "Macae" §1 in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden: Brill, 1996—); consulted online on 26.06.18.

53. Walter W. Müller and Albert Dietrich s.v. "Mariaba" in *Brill's New Pauly*.

southeast of Lathrippa, while Mecca is southwest of Yathrib.[54] Macoraba was perhaps the least aberrant, but the scholars were rarely concerned with such geodesic arguments: as late as the mid-eighteenth century a German geographer identified Mecca with Mariaba, which his own map placed in the Yemen.[55] The deciding factor, it seems, was not geography but etymology. Macoraba, one of many fruits of the "spatial turn," came with a convincing derivation that would secure its place in the scholarly tradition and ultimately supplant its rivals.

Great Mecca

From the fourteenth until the mid-seventeenth century, Western scholars knew the name Macoraba from Ptolemy, but it had no apparent significance to them. Editions of the *Geography* glossed Pharan as Mecca, but they never did this for Macoraba; when it was listed in gazetteers, Macoraba went unexplained. Yet by the nineteenth century it had become the favorite candidate for ancient Mecca in Western scholarship. The earliest on record to identify Macoraba with Mecca is almost certainly Samuel Bochart (d. 1667), a Huguenot scholar and pastor based in Caen.[56] Insofar as we can trace the vectors of influence across scholarly works, they converge on Bochart: not only his arguments for Macoraba, but even his turns of phrase would ripple across languages and genres for the next two centuries.

Bochart was recognized in his lifetime as a distinguished Orientalist; he learned Hebrew and Arabic in order to study the Bible in its Near Eastern context, which was the priority of Oriental Studies at the time.[57] His most influential work was a *Sacred Geography* (1646) in two volumes. The first, entitled *Phaleg*, traced the settlement of ancient peoples according to the Book of Genesis, a project that entailed an overall study of ancient geography. His myriad sources included of course Ptolemy. In a chapter arguing that Cush was the ancestor of the "Saracens," Bochart gave an account of Arabian geography. He correctly identified the location of the Hijaz and named some of the towns therein, including Mecca, which "in Ptolemy is Macoraba, i.e. מכת רבה *Mecca rabba* or 'great Mecca.'"[58]

This is the first recorded instance where Macoraba has been identified with Mecca. Note that it relies on a specific location and derivation: the choice is by no means arbitrary. But it is not immediately clear what language this derivation is meant to be drawn from. Bochart has transcribed MKT RBH—*Makkah rabbah*—in Hebrew characters, but this need not imply that Hebrew was the language intended: typefaces in other Semitic languages were

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54. Stückelberger and Graßhoff, *Handbuch*, vol. 2, 631.

55. Johann Michael von Loën, *Neue Sammlung der merkwürdigsten Reisegeschichten*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt/Leipzig: the Brothers van Türen, 1751), 203 n. 15; vol. 2 (1749), map 7, spelt "Maraba."

56. For his biography, see Zhur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), ch. 4, "The Phoenicians are Coming! Samuel Bochart's Protestant Geography," 141–203, 150–155.

57. Cf. Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018), 12–13; Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–3.

58. Samuel Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, 2 vols. (Caen: Petrus Cardonellus, 1646), vol. 1, *Phaleg*, 242; cf. 137, 237.

hard to come by, so Bochart in the *Sacred Geography* followed convention by transcribing Arabic words with Hebrew characters.[59] Nevertheless, MKT RBH cannot be Arabic, because the adjective *rabb*(*ah*) does not exist in Arabic.[60] Orientalists of Bochart's generation must have known this, as the word was correctly absent from their lexicons.[61] Besides, an Arabic derivation would strictly have to be *Makkah **al**-rabbah*.[62]

The adjective *rabb*(*ah*), "great," is however typical of the Northwestern group of Semitic languages, such as Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician. Not coincidentally, Phoenician was of particular interest to Bochart: the second volume of his *Sacred Geography*, entitled *Chanaan*, was a study of the Phoenician diaspora. Bochart argued that the diaspora had founded many towns across the Mediterranean and beyond, leaving clues to their presence in local legends and toponyms. Their language was not well attested, but already the resemblance to other Semitic languages was apparent.[63] Bochart argued that it was properly a dialect of Hebrew. Methodologically, this meant that he could infer Hebrew etymologies for ancient towns in order to show that they had been founded by Phoenicians.[64] *Makkah rabbah* would have been an acceptable Hebrew derivation for Macoraba, and therefore—in Bochart's schema—a plausible Phoenician colony. So it should be no surprise that "Macoraba, i.e. 'great Mecca,'" made another appearance in his second volume, as part of a chapter exploring the possibility of Phoenician colonies along the Red Sea.[65] Bochart grounded his investigation in 2 Chronicles 8, which describes a trade mission jointly supported by Solomon, king of Israel and Judah, and the Phoenician king Hiram I of Tyre: they sent ships from Ezion-Geber, a port near Eilat, to a mysterious place called Ophir. Bochart assumed that this route would have stayed open until the reign of Jehoram I of Judah, when the region of Edom achieved independence, taking the Red Sea ports with it. In Bochart's reckoning this gave the Phoenicians "a hundred and fifty years, more or less" to make their mark on the Red Sea.

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59. His publisher, Pierre de Cardonnel, may have acquired an Arabic typeface from the printer Jean Jannon, but this would have been confiscated in a raid by local authorities shortly before the *Geographia Sacra* was published. The State claimed a monopoly on foreign typefaces and was in any case wary of Protestant Orientalism. Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds*, 160, 164; Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 9, "Pierre de Cardonnel (1614–1667), Merchant, Printer, Poet, and Reader of Hobbes," 259–316, 269–271. On early Arabic printing, see also Bevilacqua, *Republic of Arabic Letters*, 57–58.

60. The medieval lexicons are consulted for the root RBB in Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 1002–1007.

61. Frans van Ravelingen, *Lexicon Arabicum* (Leiden: posthumous publication from the author's office, 1613), 170. Antonio Giggi, *Thesaurus Linguæ Arabicæ*, vol. 2 (Milan: Ambrosian College, n.d. [1632]), 286–290. Jacob van Gool, *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum* (Lyon: Bonaventure Elzevir and Abraham Elzevir, 1653) 924–925. Cf. Bevilacqua, *Republic of Arabic Letters*, 14.

62. This objection was previously noted by Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 135 n. 12.

63. Since the 1530s European scholars had tried to derive Maltese from Punic, the Carthaginian offshoot of Phoenician; Maltese is in fact derived from Arabic. Thomas Freller, "'Rusticorum Melitensium sermo fertur esse semi-Punicus?': Some notes on an international 18th century discussion," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 149/2 (1999), 205–220.

64. Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds*, 181–185.

65. Samuel Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, 2 vols. (Caen: Petrus Cardonellus, 1646), vol. 2, *Chanaan*, 761–762.

Even here, though, Bochart did not say outright that Macoraba was founded by the Phoenicians; he merely listed it among those places on the trade route that could be identified from Ptolemy. But he certainly believed that the Phoenicians were capable of leaving their telltale markers in Red Sea toponyms. In the same chapter he argued that an island off northern Ethiopia was named for a Phoenician goddess: Ptolemy calls it *Astartē*, which happens to be the Greek name for Ishtar.[66] We should bear in mind that Bochart was able to see *Makkah rabbah* in Macoraba when nobody else could; the reason, surely, was that Bochart had prepared himself to recognize Phoenician (Hebrew) derivations along the Red Sea.

If Macoraba was indeed "great Mecca," it was fair to ask by what standard it was "great." In *Phaleg*, Bochart observed that the qualifier could stand alone, or alternatively it could distinguish "great Mecca" from another, smaller Mecca.[67] To illustrate this, he drew a parallel with Hamat from the Hebrew Bible. Usually the name Hamat referred to the town of Epiphaneia, but there was also a "great Hamat," *Ḥamat rabbah*, which the commentator Jerome (d. 420) had identified as Antioch.[68] This was a sophisticated argument: not only did *Makkah rabbah* sound like Macoraba, but the comparison with *Ḥamat rabbah* seemed to anchor the hypothesis in trusted sources.

Bochart's *Sacred Geography* expertly wove biblical, Roman, medieval and contemporary sources. It became a standard reference for historical geography, reissued in 1674, 1681, 1692 and 1707. Scholars found it practical to cite and even quote him, and when they did, the passages they quoted sometimes included the identification of Mecca with Macoraba.[69] By the turn of the century the derivation "great Mecca" was appearing, unattributed, in works of history and historical geography.[70] No less an authority than Edward Gibbon

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66. Bochart, *Chanaan*, 765.

67. Bochart, *Phaleg*, 242.

68. J.P. Migne (ed.), *S. Eusebii Hieronymi... Opera Omnia*, books 5–6, *Patria Latina* vol. 25 (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1845), 1059, under Amos 6:2. A rabbinical commentary from perhaps the fifth century also identifies *Ḥamat rabbah* as Antioch: *Leviticus Rabbah* 5:3, discussing the same verse.

69. Stephanus Byzantinus, ed. Abraham van Berkel, *De Urbibus* (Leiden: Daniel à Gaesbeeck, 1688), 451 n. 79; Albert Schultens, *Historia Imperii Vetustissimi Joctanidarum in Arabia Felice* (Harderwijk: Johannes van Kasteel, 1786), 60; both quoting Bochart, *Phaleg*, 137: "...to Macoraba, i.e. Mecca, to the north." Pascal-François-Joseph Gosselin, *Recherches sur la géographie systématique et positive des anciens*, vol. 2 (Paris: L'imprimerie de la République, 1798), 115 and n. 1; tr. Gabriel Gottfried Bredow, *Untersuchungen über einzelne Gegenstände der alten Geschichte, Geographie und Chronologie*, vol. 2 (Altona: Johann Friedrich Hammerich, 1802), 144; reiterated in Adamance Coray (Adamantios Korais, tr.), Pascal-François-Joseph Gosselin (ed.), *Géographie de Strabon*, vol. 5 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1819), 298 n. 4; and apparently plagiarised by Christoph Gottlieb Groskurd, *Strabons Erdbeschreibung*, vol. 3 of 17 (Berlin / Stettin: Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1833), 319 n. 6.

70. Olfert Dapper, *Naukerige Beschryving van Asie* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1680), vol. 2, 9. Hieronymus Ditzel (tr.) and Simon de Vries (ed.), *Algemeene Weereld-Beschryving*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Amsterdam: François Halma, 1705), 64. Jodocus Crull (attributed), *An Introduction to the History of the Kingdoms and States of Asia, Africa and America* (London: T. Newborough, J. Knapton and R. Burrough, 1705), 387–8. This was a continuation of Samuel von Pufendorf's history of Europe; it was immediately translated into German under von Pufendorf's name: C.J. Wilke (tr.), *Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten von Asia, Africa und America* (Frankfurt: Friedrich Knochen, 1707), 798. Urbain Chevreau, *Histoire du Monde*, vol. 5 (Paris: Michel David the Elder, 1717), 9.

identified Mecca with Macoraba in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, commenting that "the termination of the word is expressive of its greatness."[71]

But remarkably, not one of these references would lead us to think that Macoraba was derived from Phoenician. The very framework that had made it possible to equate Mecca with Macoraba was abandoned, but the derivation lingered. We can imagine why. Most of those who consulted the *Sacred Geography* were not themselves Orientalists: they trusted Bochart's reputation, but they were not able to assess the arguments pertaining to Semitic languages. And as we have seen, Bochart did not explicitly say that Macoraba was a Phoenician colony, named from the Phoenician language. Many readers will have faithfully carried "great Mecca" into their studies without seeing its relevance to the Phoenician diaspora. Orientalist readers, on the other hand, will have known the word *rabbah* from Hebrew and Aramaic, and may have expected the conventions of toponymy in the Levant to shade into the Arabian Peninsula, without reasoning through the intrinsic problems of language and culture. *Ḥamat rabbah* set a commonsense pattern for *Makkah rabbah*, despite the geopolitical distance between Antioch and Mecca.

The upshot is that "great Mecca" was barely challenged at first, and never on historical grounds. And once it was established that Mecca was indeed Macoraba, this basic fact was free to circulate without explanation or derivation. Macoraba was then confidently identified as Mecca in histories, historical geographies and the burgeoning genre of encyclopedias over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[72]

Not only in scholarly literature did the idea take hold. Andrew Ramsay's best-selling historical novel *The Travels of Cyrus* (1727) depicted the Persian king on his journeys through the ancient world, including Macoraba, a city in the mild, perfumed region of Arabia Felix. The city itself barely features in the story, but Ramsay was moved to add a footnote: "Today Mecca. It has always been a holy place for the Arabs."[73] Within a century,

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71. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5 (London: Andrew Strahan and Thomas Cadell, 1788), 117. He does not credit Bochart, and his footnote leads to works that do not identify Mecca with Macoraba, nor do they provide this etymology.

72. Étienne-Évode Assemani (ʿAwwād al-Simʿānī), *Bibliothecae Mediceae*, etc., (Florence: Albiziano, 1742), 203, 206. J.N. Buache de la Neuville, *Géographie élémentaire moderne et ancienne*, vol. 1 (Paris: D'Houry, 1772), 70. Jérémie-Jacques Oberlin, *Orbis Antiqui* (Strasbourg: Jean Frédéric Stein, 1776), 162. Claude-François-Xavier Millot, *Élémens d'histoire générale*, part 1, *Histoire Ancienne*, vol. 2 (Switzerland: Associated bookstores, 1778), 357–8. Fabre d'Olivet, *Lettres à Sophie sur l'Histoire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Lavillette, 1801), 254–255. (Dietrich) Christopher Rommel, *Abulfedea Arabiae Descriptio* (Göttingen: Heinrich Dietrich, 1802), 67. Conrad Malte-Brun, *Précis de la Géographie Universelle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Buisson, 1810), 153. Pierre-Armand Dufau and Joseph Guadet, *Dictionnaire universel abrégé de géographie ancienne comparée* vol. 2 (Paris: Desray, 1820), 132, 144. Friedrich C.L. Sickler, *Handbuch der alten Geographie* (Cassel: J.J. Bohné, 1824), 768. David Brewster (ed.), *The Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, 1st American ed., vol. 12 of 18 (Philadelphia: Joseph and Edward Parker, 1832), 576. Alexandre-François Barbié du Bocage, *Dictionnaire géographique de la Bible* (Paris: Crapelet, 1834), 13. Andrew Crichton, *Arabia: Ancient and Modern*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and brothers, 1834), 45. Edward Hughes, *Outlines of Scripture, Geography and History* (London: Longman et al., 1853), 42. Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *A History of All Nations*, vol. 1 (Buffalo: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1854), 350. William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858), 131. François Lenormant, *Manuel d'Histoire Ancienne de l'Orient*, vol. 3 (Paris: A. Lévy, 1869), 100.

73. Andrew Michael Ramsay, *Les Voyages de Cyrus* (Paris: Gabriel-François Quillau, 1727), 135, n.

Bochart's unique idea had graduated from scholarly to literary Orientalism. Closer to our time, Arthur Conan Doyle would refer to Mecca as Macoraba in a short story from the point of view of a Byzantine merchant who encounters Muḥammad.[74]

As awareness grew, so did usage. It was conspicuously absent from three landmark encyclopaedias, all of which did comment on Mecca: d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, Chambers' *Cyclopædia*, and the latter's successor, the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert.[75] The first expansion of the *Encyclopédie* even had an entry for Macoraba, but did not relate it to Mecca.[76] But the compilation of historical and geographical knowledge was intensive and cumulative. As reference works went through new editions and reissues, several added Macoraba-as-Mecca for the first time.[77] Macoraba was not self-evidently Mecca to all observers at all times, but once Bochart had made the identification, it slowly became the preferred contender for ancient Mecca. The identification went mainstream in the eighteenth century, sometimes (but not always) accompanied by the derivation "great Mecca." And this was only the beginning for Macoraba.

Macoraba's Latitude Adjustment

Not very long after Bochart's publication, others started to build on the Macoraba hypothesis. In 1669, Jacob van Gool at Leiden University strongly implied that Macoraba

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74. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Last Galley: Impressions and Tales* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and co., 1911), 137. Other examples in fiction are David Hoffman, *Chronicles Selected from the Originals of Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew*, book 8, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), 152, 529, 545, 548; and Robert Silverberg's novella "A Hero of the Empire," first published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* vol. 97 nos. 4–5 (October–November 1999), 148–180.

75. Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale* (Paris: Compagnie des libraires, 1697), s.v. "Meccah," 569–70; on which, see Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis xiv's France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 4, "The Making of d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*," 168–204. Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopædia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London: James and John Knapton et al., 1728), s.v. "Mahometanism." Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 10, *Mammelle—Myva* (Neuchâtel: Samuel Faulche [a pseudonym at a fake address], 1765), 229, s.v. "la Mecque."

76. Edme Mentelle (ed.), *Encyclopédie méthodique: géographie ancienne*, vol. 2 (Paris: Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, 1789), 314.

77. Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, *Asiatische Völker: Perser, Phönicier, Babylonier, Scythen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1796), 622, "the caravan route... probably went to Mecca." Id., *Historische Werke*, vol. 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1824) 111: "the caravan route... probably went to Mecca, the ancient Macoraba." J.J. Eschenburg, revised ed. and tr. by N.W. Fiske, *Manual of Classical Literature* (Philadelphia: Key & Biddle, 1836), 620, §171 on Arabia Felix. Eadem, *Manual of Classical Literature*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: E.C. and J. Biddle, 1844), 53: "Macoraba was the name by which the Greeks knew Mecca." No author, *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversations-Lexikon*, 9th ed., vol. 9 of 15, *Ligny bis Mösien* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1846), 467: "The history of the town begins with Muhammad...'. No author, *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie*, etc., vol. 10 of 15, *Lüneberg bis Myus* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1853), 346: "[Mecca] was already mentioned by Ptolemy under the name Macoraba; but the history of the town begins with Muhammad...." Charles Maclaren (ed.), *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6th ed., vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1823), s.v. "Arabia," had no mention of Macoraba; a new entry was composed, including Macoraba, for MacVay Napier (ed.), *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 7th ed., vol. 3/1 (Edinburgh: Adam Black, 1842), s.v. "Arabia," 341, signed by "E."

was Mecca in his commentary on al-Farghānī's *Compendium of Astronomy.* He made a startling claim about the towns' location: "Mecca. A town built in a valley, latitude 21° 40′, where Ptolemy locates Macoraba."[78] In fact this latitude does not correspond with Ptolemy's *Geography* as we have it, nor with Yāqūt; but it is one of the latitudes that Muslim geographers had calculated for Mecca. Van Gool should have known this: 21° 40′ appears among the coordinates for Mecca in early modern works, but Ptolemy's 22° does not.[79] That is to say, he *conflated* the latitudes for Mecca and Macoraba, believing them to be the same place. It was presumably Bochart who convinced him of this: in the same work van Gool described him as "most learned" and his book *Phaleg* as "preeminent."[80] But while Bochart's arguments were philological, van Gool had launched a (superficially) persuasive geodetic argument.

Van Gool's claim that Mecca was on the same latitude as Macoraba circulated over the following century. A few works followed his lead by merely implying some relationship between the two names.[81] But others joined the dots,[82] and as early as 1680 his latitude was presented alongside Bochart's etymology, posing an explicit argument that Macoraba was Mecca. The author was another Dutchman, Olfert Dapper, in his *Precise Description of Asia*: "Some hold Mecca to be Ptolemy's ancient town Macoraba, since Mecca lies on the same latitude, 21° 40′, while Ptolemy puts Macoraba to the south of Iathrippa. Furthermore Macoraba sounds just like *Mekka rabba*, i.e. great Mecca, so called because of its noteworthy size or in contradistinction to another, smaller one."[83] Dapper did not name his sources, but the arguments were unmistakably lifted from Bochart and van Gool.

Dapper's short passage was plagiarized into broader encyclopedic works in Dutch and German over the following decades.[84] It was indeed fortunate that Bochart's idea had time

78. Jacob van Gool (Golius), *Elementa Astronomica* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius, 1669), 98.

79. Examples are collected by Johann Andreas Michael Nagel, *Prima Alcorani Sura* (Altdorf: Johann Adam Hessel, 1743), §23, 32–37. Cf. Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale* (Paris: Compagnie des libraires, 1697), s.v. "Meccah," 569.

80. Van Gool, *Elementa Astronomica*, 235.

81. Caspar Calvör, *Fissuræ Sionis* (Leipzig: Johann Christoph König, 1700), 1094; reprinted in *De Variis Orbis Religionibus* (Leipzig: Johann Christoph König, 1705), 1094: "As Golius describes it with precision in the Arabic *Alfraganus*, [Mecca] is built in a valley on latitude 21° 40′, where Ptolemy puts Macoraba." George Sale et al. (eds.), *An Universal History*, vol. 7 (London: Thomas Osborne et al., 1744), 236: "[Mecca] stands in a stony and barren valley... under the same parallel with the Macoraba of Ptolemy." Bernhard von Jenisch (tr.), *Historia Priorum Regum Persarum* [extracted from *Rawḍat al-Ṣafāʾ*] (Vienna: Joseph von Kurzböck, 1782), 95: "...Mecca, a town built in a valley on latitude 21° 40′, which of course Ptolemy also attributes to Macoraba, as Golius points out."

82. Johann Hermannson, *De Mecca, Patria Muhammedis* (Upsalla: Werner, 1725), 4–5, citing van Gool, placed Mecca on 21° 40′ and called it Macoraba.

83. Olfert Dapper, *Naukerige Beschryving van Asie* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1680), vol. 2, 9 = Johann Christoff Beern (tr.), *Umständliche und eigentliche Beschreibung von Asia* (Nuremburg: Johann Hoffmann, 1681), 300.

84. Hieronymus Ditzel (tr.) and Simon de Vries (ed.), *Algemeene Weereld-Beschryving*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Amsterdam: François Halma, 1705), 64. No ed., *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, vol. 20 (Halle/Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1739), 8. No ed., *Historisch-Politisch-Geographischer Atlas*, vol. 7 (Leipzig: Johann

to circulate before the encyclopedia as a modern, scientific genre came to maturity in the eighteenth century: encyclopedias were then an important vector in the transmission of Macoraba-as-Mecca. But while "great Mecca" was carried into the nineteenth century, van Gool's faulty latitude was not. Ptolemy's *Geography* may have been too accessible for the mistake to go unnoticed in the long run.[85]

Rabbath-Moab and Maco-Raba

In 1766 the geographer J.B.B. d'Anville discussed Macoraba briefly, but with unusual sophistication for the time. Unlike van Gool, he recognized that Ptolemy's latitude for Macoraba was 22°, but then he observed that this was only a third of a degree from the predominant latitude for Mecca, 21° 40′. He agreed with the mainstream view that Macoraba meant "great Mecca," supposing that its "greatness" was justified by its ancient and venerable temple. His most original contribution was to draw a comparison between Macoraba and a pair of ancient towns further north: he observed that the word *rabbah* had appeared (in construct form) in the names of Rabbath-Ammon and Rabbath-Moab, today Amman and al-Rabbah in Jordan.[86] Like Bochart with *Ḥamat rabbah*, d'Anville trusted that the conventions of toponymy in the Levant would carry over into the Hijaz. If "Arabians"—broadly conceived—were known to call their towns *rabbah*, then the popular reading of Macoraba as "great Mecca" would surely be strengthened.

Sadly, his contemporaries did not acknowledge and address this contribution. D'Anville's study of the Red Sea was less influential than his *Abridged Geography*, where he did again refer to "Maco-raba"—"the second part of which is fit to designate a large and principal town"—but not the comparison with Rabbath-Ammon and Rabbath-Moab.[87] Other historical geographers therefore reproduced the spelling "Maco-raba" from d'Anville, but neglected the comparison with biblical toponyms.[88]

Samuel Heinsius, 1747), 1006–1007.

85. This careful distinction would even approach a reversal of van Gool's position in 1809, when G.W.S. Beigel carried out geodesic calculations on the assumption that Mecca lay at 22° latitude, because this was where Ptolemy put Macoraba. He did acknowledge that 21° 40′ was the preferred figure among the Arabic geographers, but he reasoned that these thinkers had owed a great deal of their knowledge to Ptolemy, so Ptolemy's data should take precedence. Georg Wilhelm Sigismund Beigel, "Abulfeda's Beschreibung von Aegypten," etc., in (no ed.) *Fundgruben des Orients* (Vienna: Anton Schmid and K.K. Privil, 1809), 409–425, 416 n.

86. Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, *Mémoires sur l'Égypte ancienne et moderne, suivis d'une description du Golfe Arabique ou de la Mer Rouge* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1766), 246–247. Excerpts tr. Johann Christoph Gatterer, *Allgemeine historische Bibliothek*, vol. 11 (Halle: Johann Justinus Gebauer, 1769), 27–130; Macoraba is on 114.

87. Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, *Géographie ancienne abrégée*, vol. 2 of 3 (Paris: Merlin, 1768), 217.

88. Alexander Adam, *A Summary of Geography and History, both Ancient and Modern*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1802), 791. Karl Friedrich Köppen and Samuel Christoph Wagener, *Universal-Lexicon der Völker- und Ländergeschichte*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Maßdorff, 1806), 220. Louis de Barentin de Montchal, *Géographie ancienne et historique, composée d'après les cartes de d'Anville*, vol. 1 (Paris: Égron et al., 1807), 120–121. James Playfair, *A System of Geography, Ancient and Modern*, vol. 6 of 6 (Edinburgh: Peter Hill, 1814), 9. Emma Willard, *Ancient Geography, as Connected with Chronology*, etc. (Hartford: Oliver D. Cooke and sons, 1822), 22. Émile Lefranc, *Histoire Ancienne*, 4th ed. (Roanne: Étienne Perisse, 1837), 29. S. Augustus Mitchell, *Mitchell's Ancient*

D'Anville's contribution was soon forgotten, but it was not lost forever. The comparison of Macoraba with Rabbath-Moab would be revived—independently, it seems—more than a century later by Aloys Sprenger, Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Bern. In his *Ancient Arabian Geography* (1875), Sprenger argued that *rabbah* had the sense of "capital," as in Rabbath-Moab, the capital of Moab. (He did not adduce Rabbath-Ammon, which might equally be read as the capital of Ammon.) Macoraba, on the other hand, would be "Mecca the capital," which does not quite fit the model. Sprenger anticipated this, and further argued that Macoraba was an abbreviation of the town's full name, which had fortunately been recorded by Pliny in his first-century *Natural History* as Mariaba Baramalacum, a town of inland Arabia.[89] Sprenger read this full name as "Mecca the capital of the Malik tribe."[90]

The problems are manifold. It is hard to see Mecca in Mariaba, which should also be in the construct form, *Makkah rabbat*. Sprenger's evidence for a Malik hegemony in Mecca is highly conjectural; besides, this tribe would be the "sons of Malik" in Arabic, *banū Malik*, suggesting a form like *Makkah rabbat banī Malik*, which does not agree with Baramalacum. Sprenger tried to explain that Baramalacum was from the Aramaic *bar*, meaning "son of;" but even if we had reason to place an Aramaic name in Mecca, the plural of *bar* is surely *bnay*.

These linguistic objections are troubling, but there is also a weakness in his source: Mariaba Baramalacum suffers from inconsistent spelling across manuscripts of Pliny. Sprenger's reading is harder to derive from Marippa Palmalacum, for example.[91] Furthermore, it is unclear whether the two words should be read together as "Mariaba of the *Baramalaces," where the –*um* of Baramalacum represents a Latin genitive, or separately as distinct place-names in a list: "Mariaba, Baramalacum," etc.[92] And even if we assume that Sprenger has reproduced and parsed the text correctly, we are left with the problem of geography. Pliny's description seems to lead us down the Red Sea coast past the Minaeans before reaching Mariaba Baramalacum; since we know the Minaeans were in northern Yemen, that would place the town well south of Mecca and Macoraba.

Sprenger's use of Mariaba Baramalacum was rightly neglected; in a later survey of the Macoraba question, Adolf Grohmann would say that it "naturally cannot be taken seriously."[93] Sprenger's treatment of the Macoraba problem was one of the most ambitious,

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Geography (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait and co., 1845), 35.

89. Harris Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1961), 455–456 (§6.32).

90. Aloys Sprenger, *Die alte Geographie Arabiens als Grundlage der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Semitismus*, (Bern: Huber and co., 1875), 155, 210. Cf. id., "The Campaign of Ælius Gallus in Arabia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series, 6/1 (1873), 121–141, 130.

91. Otto Blau, "Altarabische Sprachstudien," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 25/4 (1871), 525–592, 587.

92. The latter reading is followed by Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2, 455–456.

93. Adolf Grohmann, "Makoraba," in Georg Wissowa et al. (eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: Neue Bearbeitung*, vol. 14/1, "Lysimachos–Mantike" (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1928), 807–808.

but it was also one of the last to favor the derivation "great Mecca."[94] Bochart's unique idea to read Macoraba as *Makkah rabbah* had projected the name into the Orientalist canon, and his original derivation predominated for two hundred and fifty years; but other derivations were attempted, drawing on several other languages, and one of these would emerge as the new consensus by the early twentieth century. We shall now examine these other bids to etymologize Macoraba.

Macoraba the *Miḥrāb*

Once it was established that Macoraba was Mecca, Western thinkers were free to imagine alternative derivations to Bochart's "great Mecca." In 1711 Jean Chardin, a traveller in Persia, India, and the Caucasus, proposed that Macoraba was "Mecca of the Arabs," "following the ancient habit of joining a name to a town—that of the country where it was situated or the people who lived there—of which we see several examples in the Old Testament."[95] Chardin may well have been thinking of Rabbath-Moab and Rabbath-Ammon. Though it is hard to say why, Chardin's readers do not seem to have disseminated his idea. Much later the Victorian officer Richard F. Burton proposed the same derivation,[96] but in recent years it has been confined to apologetical literature.[97] Rightly so: the diverse, divided peoples of ancient Arabia would scarcely have thought to call themselves "the Arabs."[98]

Far more successful was a hypothesis by Giuseppe Simone Assemani (al-Simʿānī), a Lebanese priest and Orientalist who studied Near Eastern manuscripts for the Vatican.[99] He wrote a history of the Nestorian Church, published in 1728, which included a dense treatment of the history and geography of Arabia. Unsurprisingly, Ptolemy and Bochart were among his sources. When it came to Mecca, Assemani first acknowledged Bochart's opinion, then offered an alternative: "Mecca, or Becca, Ptol. Macoraba, i.e. *Mecca rabba* or great Mecca as Bochart thinks; or perhaps محراب *Machrab*, temple, because there was a shrine of the Arabs there, inside which was the idol Beccha or Baccha."[100] The next year he

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94. Clément Huart, *Histoire des Arabes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1912), 6, likewise contended that Macoraba was Aramaic for 'great Mecca'.

95. Jean Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, vol. 7 (Amsterdam: Jean-Louis de Lorme, 1711), 373–374.

96. Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1874), 36 n.

97. E.g. Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2002), 302.

98. This is the central argument of Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

99. His biography is in Georg Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, vol. 3 (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1949), 444–455; cf. Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018), 22–23.

100. Giuseppe Simone Assemani (Joseph Simonius Assemanus), *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, vol. 3 part 2, *De Syris Nestorianis* (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis, 1728), 561.

published the same gloss, almost verbatim, in his commentary on a translation of Buṭrus ibn al-Rāhib.[101]

The Arabic word here—which he has unhelpfully transcribed "Machrab"—is *miḥrāb*. In general usage a *miḥrāb* is a niche in the wall of a mosque signalling the direction of prayer, usually toward Mecca. Apparently, though, Assemani was referring to a less common sense of the word, meaning a place of worship. This definition was rare but the medieval lexicographers did acknowledge it, and it may have been one meaning of the term as used in the Qurʾan.[102] In historical context it made sense for Macoraba to be a "temple" because Mecca had been a center of the pagan cult before Islam. The traditional view was that before Muḥammad, the Kaʿbah had housed cult images.[103] Some early Orientalists believed that Bacchus was one of these "idols," and that his name was preserved in yet another name for Mecca, Bakkah.[104] Assemani approved this.[105] It was a coherent solution: in ancient times Mecca was known for its temple and its god, both of which became metonyms for the town itself, Macoraba and Bakkah.

Because Assemani gave Bochart's "great Mecca" alongside his own "temple," subsequent literature reproduced them together. In 1768 A.F. Büsching named both scholars with their opinions in his *New Geography*;[106] this work proved highly successful and was translated into Dutch, Italian and French.[107] In 1799 Konrad Mannert reproduced the two derivations, unattributed, in his *Geography of the Greeks and Romans*, as did Ludwig Georgius in his *Ancient Geography*, 1838.[108] Then in 1844 Albert Forbiger at Leipzig University directly cited Mannert for the two etymologies in his *Handbook to Ancient Geography*, and again in 1846 for an encyclopedia entry on Macoraba. This was published in August Pauly's *Encyclopaedia*

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101. Abraham Ecchellensis (al-Ḥaqilānī, tr.), Giuseppe Simone Assemani (ed.), *Chronicon Orientale Petrirahebi Ægyptii* (Venice: Bartholomeus Javarina, 1729), 228.

102. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1865), 541, s.v. ḤRB. Cf. Qurʾan 19:11: "So he went out to his people from the *miḥrāb*...." I would like to thank two readers of my personal blog, whom I know only as David Marrakchi and Tariq, for kindly bringing this usage to my attention.

103. For an alternative view on pre-Islamic "idolatry," see G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: from Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

104. The notion that Mecca (*Makkah*) was also known as Bakkah is traditionally inferred from Qurʾan 3:96: "The first temple established for the people was the one at Bakkah...." There is however no convincing explanation for the difference between the two names.

105. Bochart, *Phaleg*, 242–3; Assemani, *De Syris Nestorianis*, 583.

106. Anton Friderich [sic] Büsching, *Neue Erdbeschreibung*, vol. 5 part 1 (Hamburg: Johann Earl Bohn, 1768), 523.

107. Jacobus de Jongh Jr. (tr.), *Nieuwe Geographie, of Aardryks-Beschryving*, vol. 5 part 1, *Verscheide Landen van* Asia (Amsterdam: Steven van Esvelt and Abraham van Paddenburg, 1770) 561–2. Christian Joseph (Gaudioso) Jagemann (tr.), *Nuova Geografia*, vol. 28 (Venice: Antonio Zatta, 1779), 194. Jean-Pierre Bérenger (tr.), *Géographie de Büsching*, vol. 8 (Lausanne: Société Typographique, 1780), 476. An English translation was also published, but too early to comprise Büsching's volume on Asia: Patrick Murdoch (tr.), *A New System of Geography*, 6 vols. (London: Andrew Millar, 1762).

108. Konrad Mannert, *Geographie der Griechen und Römer*, vol. 6 part 1 (Nuremberg: Ernst Christoph Grattenauer, 1799), 113; cf. 198, where he does explicitly cite Bochart apud Assemani. Ludwig Georgius, *Alte Geographie*, etc., vol. 1, *Asia. Afrika* (Stuttgart: Schweizerbart, 1838), 268 n. 3.

of Classical Antiquity, a landmark in modern historical studies and the first in a series of "Paulys."[109]

Crucially, everyone who carried Assemani's derivation from "temple" also copied his transcription "Machrab," but never the word *miḥrāb* in Arabic script. This proved fatal to Assemani's contribution. Classicists faithfully reproduced the claim that a "Machrab" was a temple, without being able to assess it; and Orientalists, who might otherwise have respected and reinforced the derivation, may not have understood what "Machrab" signified either. Even a fluent Arabist would struggle to recognize it as the word *miḥrāb*: not only was the spelling unhelpful, but the meaning "temple" was relatively uncommon.[110]

This was unwittingly illustrated in the second "Pauly." The new entry on Macoraba, published in 1928, was then the fullest survey of the name's interpretations in Western scholarship. However, the author, Adolf Grohmann, did not understand what "Machrab" signified. He might have understood better if he had found Assemani's original argument with the word *miḥrāb* in Arabic text, but he was unable to trace the idea back further than Mannert, who had neglected to name his sources. As a result, Grohmann conflated Mannert's derivation with another—which we shall examine below—deriving Macoraba from a word for "temple" in Ancient South Arabian; in reality, this was first proposed long after Mannert's death. It was no longer clear that "Machrab" was even an Arabic word.[111]

Without Orientalist backing, the *miḥrāb* hypothesis failed to establish itself in the twentieth century. Few scholars have tried to derive Macoraba from *miḥrāb* since then.[112] This is for the best. The Arabic letter *ḥāʾ* represents a pharyngeal fricative, which the Greek writers could not approximate, so they tended to drop it from transcription: thus *Abderaman* for ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Arethas* for Ḥārith. They would hardly approximate it with

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109. Albert Forbiger, *Handbuch der Alten Geographie*, vol. 2, *Asia. Africa.* (Leipzig: Mayer and Wigand, 1844), 751 n. 52. Id., "Macoraba," in August Pauly (ed.), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1846), 1346.

110. For examples of this usage, see R. B. Serjeant, "*Miḥrāb*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22/1/3 (1959), 439–453, 439–441; and Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Mihrab: from Text to Form," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30/1 (1998), 1–27, esp. 6–14.

111. Adolf Grohmann, "Makoraba," in Georg Wissowa et al. (eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: Neue Bearbeitung*, vol. 14/1, "Lysimachos–Mantike" (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1928), 807–808. Already in 1911 Martin Hartmann—a supporter of the Ancient South Arabian hypothesis—recognized that Mannert could not have made a derivation from that language, and correctly intuited that "Machrab" was an attempt to transcribe *miḥrāb*. Martin Hartmann, "Makoraba. Eine Abwehr und eine Warnung," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 6 (1911), 281–282.

112. Jean Morillon, *Massignon* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1964), 39, says that Macoraba may derive from "a Semitic word, 'mihrab', meaning 'temple'." But his footnote leads to A.J. Wensinck and Jacques Jomier s.v. "Kaʿba," in the French translation of the second *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, where the derivation is "south Arabian or Ethiopian *mikrab*, i.e., a temple"—we will discuss this derivation below. Morillon's "mihrab" is therefore a typographical mistake or an overcorrection; it is not clear that he had reasoned through the derivation. *Miḥrāb* is now out of favor among historians, though it is mentioned as a possibility in a theological work by Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, tr. Desmond Maurer and Saba Risaluddin, *The Praised and the Virgin* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5 n. 5.

their own letter *kappa*, a velar stop.[113] The derivation of Macoraba from *miḥrāb* was always spurious.

City of the Ḥarb

Nevertheless, another derivation, with its own unique line of argumentation, would try to read Macoraba with a *ḥāʾ*. This one was coined by a Victorian churchman called Charles Forster. His most famous work is the unappetizing *Mahometanism Unveiled*, which opposed Gibbon's secular historiography, instead offering a providential role for Islam as a gateway to Christianity.[114] But he wrote other imaginative studies of Near Eastern languages and historical geography, including a *Historical Geography of Arabia* (1844), in which he proposed a new derivation for Macoraba. Although Macoraba was "correctly pronounced by the learned" to be Mecca, in his view, Forster did not address any of the earlier hypotheses; nevertheless, his original argument for Macoraba developed certain other conclusions from Samuel Bochart's *Sacred Geography*.[115]

Bochart had applied his Phoenician method to the names of peoples as well as places. Agatharchides in the second century BCE and Pliny the Elder in the first century CE seemed to report independently the name of a certain people in southwest Arabia, called the Karbai in Greek and the Cerbani in Latin. The ancient sources knew almost nothing about them; Pliny merely reported that they and their neighbors "excel as warriors."[116] That was enough for Bochart to speculate that the name Karbai or Cerbani was derived from a Phoenician word for warlikeness: in Hebrew a root for warfare is QRB.[117] Forster appreciated Bochart's linguistic reasoning, but argued that a Phoenician derivation was unnecessary when the same meaning could be derived from the native Arabic root ḤRB, also used for matters of war. He further posited that the Karbai/Cerbani were the Ḥarb tribe, attested since the early centuries of Islam: the name itself can be read literally as "sons of war," and the tribe was—he argued—appropriately belligerent.

These were bold conclusions, but Forster did not stop there. A major objective of the *Historical Geography* was to affirm "the truth of the Mosaic accounts of the first peopling of Arabia;"[118] like the humanists before him, Forster meant to harmonize the Bible with other kinds of evidence. He therefore argued that "sons of war" was a *nom de guerre* for the biblical Qedarites, a similarly warlike Arabian people. This implied a resonance between

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113. Occasionally Arabic *ḥāʾ* was rendered by Greek *chi*; see Maxime Rodinson, "Sur la prononciation ancienne du *qāf* arabe," in David Cohen (ed.), *Mélanges Marcel Cohen* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 298–319, 315–316. In Ancient Greek *chi* was another velar stop; but in later stages, by the time Greek writers were transcribing Arabic words, it was pronounced as a palatal or velar fricative, much closer to *ḥāʾ* than *kappa* ever was.

114. Charles Forster, *Mahometanism Unveiled*, 2 vols. (London: James Duncan and John Cochran, 1829).

115. Charles Forster, *Historical Geography of Arabia; or, The Patriarchal Evidences of Revealed Religion* (London: James Duncan and Frederick Malcolm, 1844), vol. 1, 251–266; cf. vol. 2, 141, 325.

116. Stanley Mayer Burstein (ed.), *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1989), 159. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2, 458–459, §6.32.

117. Bochart, *Phaleg*, 162.

118. Forster, *Historical Geography*, vol. 1, vii–viii.

biblical and Islamic genealogy, for the patriarch Qedar was a son of Ishmael, who had resided at Mecca, and both patriarchs were considered progenitors of Muḥammad's tribe, the Quraysh. If Forster's equation held true, then Mecca was originally the capital of the Qedar, also known as the Ḥarb, whose namesakes had prospered in the Hijaz until Forster's time. Assuming that Mecca was Ptolemy's Macoraba, Forster was able to derive the town's name from the Arabic word *muḥāribah*, meaning literally "warlike" and implying some relationship with the Ḥarb. "Mecca" was then "an idiomatic abbreviation" of this original name.

Forster's hypothesis was cited a decade later in a successful *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, under the entry for Macoraba, by George Williams—another churchman with a penchant for ancient geography.[119] But it had little to no impact on the Orientalist community. Forster took such leaps of interpretation—geographical, historical and phonological—that we hardly need to critique the argument. His grandson, the novelist E.M. Forster, would modestly say that the old rector "had the disadvantage of resting on imperfect research."[120] We might add that Forster's book was a tribute to works like Samuel Bochart's *Sacred Geography*, weaving theology and history with great imagination but not much rigor.

Great Slaughter

While Forster dallied with Bochart, the Orientalist community was already starting to forget him. Some twenty years later when Reinhart Dozy approached Macoraba, it was through more recent geographies, which took for granted that it was an ancient name for Mecca.[121] What these geographies lacked was any attempt at etymology. Dozy, who was an accomplished Arabist and longstanding Professor of History at Leiden, proposed a new derivation in his monograph *The Israelites at Mecca* (1864), a radical application of biblical criticism to the study of Islam's origins.

Dozy noted a problem with the conventional view of Macoraba: for all its nebulous chronology, the Muslim historical tradition may indicate that Mecca was founded too late for Ptolemy to have known it. Some Orientalists had therefore rejected the identification of Macoraba with Mecca.[122] Dozy conceded that this was a problem, but offered a novel

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119. George Williams s.v. "Macoraba," in William Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, vol. 2 of 2, *Iabadius—Zymethus* (London: John Murray, 1857), 239–240, 239. Williams published a historical geography of Jerusalem and announced, but never released, a study of the Holy Land: see William Prideaux Courtney s.v. "Williams, George (1814–1878)," in Sidney Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 61 (1900), 399–400.

120. Jeffrey M. Heath (ed.), *The Creator as Critic, and Other Writings by E.M. Forster* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008), 109.

121. He names two, which appear to be Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde…oder allgemeine, vergleichende Geographie*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1818), 211; Heinrich Kiepert, *Atlas der Alten Welt* (Weimar: Geographische Institut, 1848), 19.

122. I do not know which scholars he is referring to, still less whether they wrote on the subject. Yet an anonymous reviewer would quote Dozy on this point, adding: "None of the Professor's new arguments have induced us to leave the ranks of the Orientalists." *The Athenæum* 2007 (January–June 1866), 499.

solution: the name had existed before the town. Not only that, but since no Arabic root could account for the name Mecca—in Dozy's view—the solution linking Mecca to Macoraba was to be sought in another language altogether.

Like the historical geographers before him, Dozy found Mecca in the Hebrew Bible: Macoraba was the Hebrew term *makkah rabbah*, "great slaughter," as in 2 Chronicles 13:17. Mecca was built on the site of a great battlefield. "No wonder the Arabs, who did not know Hebrew, could not explain the name!" For Dozy, that battlefield was the one where the Simeonite tribe of Israel had defeated a party of Canaanites. Judges 1:17 reports that they "destroyed" (*yaḥarimu*) the Canaanites' town, which is punningly called Ḥormah. The town is unidentified, but Dozy related it to the Arabic word *ḥaram*, the "sanctuary" at Mecca. He argued therefore that the Simeonites had conquered the land where Mecca would eventually grow. The settlers became known as Ishmaelites, and also "immigrants," in Hebrew *gerim*, which gave its name to the Jurhum tribe of Meccan folklore. Through this narrative Dozy was able to explain certain parallels between Muslim and Israelite rituals as the residues of an Israelite conquest.[123]

The book caused an immediate furor. Dozy's arguments were learned but often tenuous, delivered in a polemical and irreverent style that could only have rankled a large section of the community: it was still a matter of fierce debate whether philology was even a legitimate approach to the Bible. A handful of reviewers with their own connections to the liberal circles at Leiden did appreciate Dozy's revisionist narrative, including his derivation for Macoraba.[124] But the overwhelming reaction from rabbis and Orientalists was critical to the point of cruelty.[125]

Objections were also levelled specifically at the Macoraba hypothesis. K.H. Graf, a pioneer of source-criticism, panned the book and insisted that Hebrew *makkah* "does not mean a battle, still less a victory, but a defeat; is it really conceivable that a people should have named its shrine or its city *Clades Magna*?"[126] And beyond the formal territory of Orientalist scholarship, a more eccentric objection came from the British explorer Richard F. Burton, who had come to believe that Mecca was sacred to the Hindus and Zoroastrians in ancient times, rather than the Simeonites; as for "great slaughter," was this "a likely name for a Holy Place?"[127]

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123. Reinhart Dozy, *De Israëlieten te Mekka van Davids tijd tot in de vijfde eeuw onzer tijdrekening* (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman, 1864), 80–81, 94–95; id., *Die Israeliten zu Mekka von Davids Zeit bis in's fünfte Jahrhundert unsrer Zeitrechnung* (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman, 1864), 72–73, 85.

124. Michael Jan de Goeje, "De Israëlieten te Mekka," *De Gids* 28 (1864), 298–312, Macoraba on 301; Jan Pieter Nicolaas Land, "Een niewe Lichtstraal op het Oude Verbond," *De Nederlandsche Spectator* 29 (1864), 227–229, Macoraba on 227; Jan Carel Matthes, "Een niewe Ontdekking," *De Tijdspiegel* 2 (1864), 349–369, Macoraba on 359.

125. Ran HaCohen, tr. Michelle Engel, *Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible: German-Jewish Reception of Biblical Criticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 140–151; Herman Paul, "Virtue Language in Nineteenth-Century Orientalism: A Case Study in Historical Epistemology," *Modern Intellectual History* 14/3 (2017), 689–715.

126. Karl Heinrich Graf, "Die Israeliten zu Mekka," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 19 (1865), 330–351, 343.

127. Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz,

Over the following years, even those who saw value in *The Israelites at Mecca* did not promote his "great slaughter" with much enthusiasm. Henricus Oort, who built extensively on Dozy's narrative, did not see fit to adduce Macoraba himself.[128] Leone Caetani welcomed the derivation in his influential *Annals of Islam*, but this was effectively hidden among the addenda.[129] Its most vocal supporter was probably the Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso, who also wrote a translation of Oort.[130] But once the initial flurry of controversy had passed, Dozy's revisionist narrative attracted few supporters, and over time he came to doubt it himself.[131] Julius Wellhausen would speak for the next generation of Orientalists in asserting that Dozy had found no "solid evidence" that Mecca was a "Jewish foundation."[132] In spite of Dozy's abiding reputation as a heavyweight scholar, the largely hostile reception of *The Israelites at Mecca* doomed "great slaughter" to obscurity.

A conservative paradigm would reign over Early Islamic Studies for another century. History was the study of great men and their politics, inscribed in literature, which the shrewd historian could assess for bias. Muḥammad's life was a matter of record, and the Qurʾan was an authorial testament to the changing course of his career.[133] This positivistic understanding of Early Islam had little patience for more challenging works like *The Israelites at Mecca*, which were swept to the margins, for better or worse. These conditions held until the 1970s, when a minority of scholars—independently, with many distinct approaches—began agitating for radical changes in method and theory. Reluctantly, the paradigm was shifting.[134]

One of these "revisionists" was Günter Lüling. Today he is best known for arguing that parts of the Qurʾan were developed out of Christian strophic hymns, imparting a very un-Islamic theology; this was the subject of his doctoral dissertation at Erlangen-

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1874), vol. 1, 61–62 n.; vol. 3, 36 n. Burton's ecumenical vision for the ancient Kaʿbah has deeper roots in the Orientalist tradition, which I hope to explore in a future publication.

128. Henricus Oort, *De Dienst der Baälim in Israël* (Leiden: P. Engels, 1864).

129. Leone Caetani, *Annali dell' Islām*, vol. 1 (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1905), xv.

130. John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua, Critically Examined*, vol. 5 (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1865), "Appendix I: The Israelitish Origin of the Sanctuary at Mecca," 265–278, esp. 272–274. Id., "Israelites in Mecca," *The Athenæum* 2007 (January–June 1866), 497–498. Id. (tr.), *The Worship of Baalim in Israel* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1865).

131. Michael Jan de Goeje, "Levensbericht van Reinhart Dozy," in (no ed.) *Jaarboek van de Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1883) 12–52, 37–39; tr. Victor Chauvin, *Biographie de Reinhart Dozy* (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 30–31.

132. Julius Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, vol. 3, *Reste arabischen Heidentumes* [sic] (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1887), 89.

133. This was already the established mode of Orientalist scholarship: see Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75, on "positivist historicism."

134. Chase F. Robinson, "Crone and the End of Orientalism," in Asad Q. Ahmed et al. (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 597–620.

Nuremberg.[135] But he also applied himself to Biblical Studies. In a little-known article, published in 1985, Lüling affirmed and elaborated Dozy's narrative of Simeonite conquest: not only were there Simeonites at Mecca, but over the following centuries the Meccan cult was controlled by Levite emigrants. In this article he tried to lay the foundations for a "New Paradigm" for the study of both Ancient Israel and Early Islam.[136]

Lüling argued that the local sanctuary or "high place" in Israel and Arabia was originally a grave where the local hero was interred and revered. The priesthood at each site was figuratively adopted by the hero and empowered to enforce the blood feud in that community. In Israel the local heroes all came to be identified as Yahweh, which effectively merged the priestly families into one tribe, the Levites. But wherever a state tried to exercise a monopoly on violence, the blood feud and its priestly enforcers stood in the way. Consequently, when Josiah reformed the Judaean cult in the later seventh century BCE, he shut down the "high places" in favor of the temple in Jerusalem.

In Lüling's interpretation, this reform dispossessed the local Levites, who then abandoned the centralizing state of Judah and established themselves among the tribal societies of Arabia, performing the rites at their neighbors' "high places" without fear of state intervention. One was at Mecca, conquered from the Amalekites in a "great slaughter." The Hebrew diaspora went on to seize and manage the Arabian incense trade, leaving subtle clues to their identity: for instance, the renegade priests who were condemned in Judah as "heretics" (*minim*) became known in the Yemen as Minaeans.

This sketch is enough to show how Lüling made use of Dozy's derivation for Macoraba, but the article is denser and richer than I can adequately convey; it is unfortunate that, like all of Lüling's work, it was neglected during his lifetime. Outside of Erlangen, German academia refused to acknowledge his troublesome dissertation: his academic career was over before it had begun.[137] As a result, Lüling published many of his findings—including this article—through an independent press under the family name. Even when he translated his "New Paradigm" into English, he published it through a smaller journal that folded a few years later. While Dozy's book had drawn a rapid fierce response, Lüling's article has drawn scarcely any attention; and while Dozy's revisionism put a wobble in an otherwise stable career, Lüling's was judged harshly enough to expel him from the academy.

Lüling did not, therefore, encourage a new generation to recall and contest "great slaughter" as a possible reading of Macoraba. But he did illustrate how that reading might be rehabilitated. "Great slaughter" will sound most implausible unless we allow the possibility

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135. Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qurʾan* (Erlangen: Hannelore Lüling, 1974); revised and translated as *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, etc. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003).

136. Günter Lüling, "Ein neues Paradigma für die Entstehung des Islam und seine Konsequenzen für ein neues Paradigma der Geschichte Israels," in id., *Sprache und Archaisches Denken: Neun Aufsätze zur Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte* (Erlangen: Hannelore Lüling, 1985), 193–226; Macoraba on 212. An English translation was published as "A New Paradigm for the Rise of Islam and its Consequences for a New Paradigm of the History of Israel," *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 7/1 (Spring 2000), 23–53.

137. Fred M. Donner, "In Memoriam: Günter Lüling," *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017), 229–234.

that there were Hebrew speakers in ancient Mecca—just as we should allow for Aramaic or Phoenician speakers in the case of "great Mecca." If we make that allowance, we may then find room for speculation: a struggle between native inhabitants and the Hebrew immigrants *could have been* memorialized as a proven collocation, *makkah rabbah*, whose meaning was later forgotten.

There is a difficult lesson in this. "Great Mecca" has persisted and developed since Bochart's day, but its sponsors have never adequately accounted for the use of Aramaic or Phoenician in a name for Mecca. On the other hand, "great slaughter" has generated next to no further research, but Dozy and Lüling each attempted a historical context for this derivation. I do not mean to vindicate "great slaughter"—it is assuredly fanciful—but to ask why any other hypothesis should blithely parachute foreigners into Mecca to account for a pleasing derivation. As we shall see, Ancient Judaeans are not even the strangest people to have visited Macoraba.

Akkadian and Ancient South Arabian

Until the late nineteenth century, speculation over Macoraba recruited Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew (albeit once posing as Phoenician), all of which were available to Orientalists. Then, major advances in historical linguistics opened up new possibilities. In 1841 two German scholars independently published their research deciphering Ancient South Arabian, a small family of closely related Semitic languages in the Yemen in the centuries leading up to Islam.[138] Around the same time Akkadian, the imperial language of Babylonia, was recovered. In 1857 the Royal Asiatic Society ran a test where four scholars independently translated an unpublished Akkadian text; the results were satisfactory.[139] From then on, Akkadian and Ancient South Arabian were potential resources for Orientalist scholarship. Both languages were eventually adduced to explain Macoraba.

A leading contributor to the study of both languages was Joseph Halévy, based in Paris. In 1905 he proposed Akkadian influence on the name Macoraba. Like Bochart's Phoenician hypothesis, Halévy's idea should be read within a broader framework. In his lifetime, the early history of Babylonia was highly uncertain. Today we know that cuneiform was used to write a non-Semitic language, which we call Sumerian, before it was adapted to Akkadian; the two languages had an intimate literary relationship in the third millennium BCE. At the turn of the century the existence of a Sumerian people was already posited, but Halévy firmly denied it: to his mind, Babylonia was thoroughly Semitic, linguistically and racially.[140] Moreover—he believed—the speakers of Semitic languages shared a racial disposition that facilitated cultural diffusion. The unique brilliance of Babylonian civilization therefore radiated into the more primitive societies of Arabia and the Levant.

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138. Also known as Old or Epigraphic South Arabian. Edward Lipiński s.v. "South Arabian," in Keith Allen (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272–274.

139. William H. Stiebing, Jr., *Uncovering the Past: A History of Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 92–96.

140. The political commitments informing the Sumerian hypothesis are outlined by Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 202.

His examples were mostly drawn from comparative mythology. In Arabia, he maintained, not only the gods but also the institution of priesthood were taken from Babylonia. If Arabian religion was drawn from Babylonia, then the foremost Arabian temple might plausibly have borrowed its name from Akkadian in the distant past: Macoraba "originally designated the celebrated central sanctuary of the region. This name is derived from the verb *karaba*, which in Babylonian means 'worship, bless, pray,' an evident proof of an ancient borrowing from the idiom of the cuneiform texts."[141] Halévy had an Akkadian root for Macoraba and a framework for situating Akkadian words in the Hijaz, although he did not examine the morphology of Macoraba and how it might relate to Akkadian forms.

Halévy's idea was not taken up; perhaps other scholars did not share his view that cultural diffusion would account for an Akkadian toponym in the Hijaz.[142] Far more successful, around the same time, was a hypothesis drawn from Ancient South Arabian. The first to suggest this was probably Eduard Glaser, a Bohemian archaeologist whose work in the Yemen was pathbreaking. He wrote an *Outline of Arabian History and Geography* (1890) where, with easy confidence, he asserted that Mecca was Macoraba, and Macoraba was derived from "Makrab, Mikrâb or Makârîb," meaning "temple." In fact Glaser went further: he related Macoraba to Mochorba, a port mentioned by Pliny, and speculated that this was modern Jeddah or some other port serving Macoraba, for which it would surely have been named.[143]

The latter claim did not catch on, which is probably for the best, as Pliny's Mochorba is not in the Hijaz, but in the southeast, around Oman.[144] As for the derivation of Macoraba, Glaser's "Makrab, Mikrâb or Makârîb" was not Arabic, but a series of attempts to vocalize an Ancient South Arabian word for "temple," MKRB. This derivation assumed, once again, that Macoraba was Mecca, and that Mecca was the site of a very old and famous temple. To that extent, it cohered with the traditional view of Meccan prehistory. Yet Glaser did not explain how a town in the Hijaz might have acquired an Ancient South Arabian name.

Such an explanation was attempted in 1909 by Martin Hartmann in his archaeological study of the Yemen. According to early Muslim lore, he observed, tribes had periodically migrated from the Yemen and established themselves elsewhere in the peninsula, including

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141. Joseph Halévy, "The Relations of Babylonia with Other Semitic Countries," in Henry Smith Williams (ed.), *The Historians' History of the World*, vol. 1, *Prologomena; Egypt, Mesopotamia* (London: The History Association, 1905), 309–317, 314. For the Akkadian root, cf. A. Leo Oppenheim et al. (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 7 (Chicago, Illinois: Oriental Institute, 1960), 62–66; vol. 8 (id., 1971), 193.

142. In the broader Orientalist community at the turn of the century, Babylonian diffusion was hotly debated for its purported influence on the Hebrew Bible: the potential for anti-literalist and even anti-Semitic readings was plain to see. We may wonder if the conservative pushback might have dampened the reception of Halévy's pan-Babylonianism. Cf. Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 227–251.

143. Eduard Glaser, *Skizze der Geschichte und Geographie Arabiens*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1890), 87, 235.

144. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 134–135. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2, 450–451 (§6.32): "portus Mochorbae."

Mecca; some of these migrants may have spoken Ancient South Arabian.[145] An alternative solution was proffered by Philip Khuri Hitti in 1973. In Ptolemy's day the Yemen was a producer and a distributor on the incense route between India and the Mediterranean, and it has long been assumed—though never proven—that Mecca was a caravan city on the same route. Hitti postulated that Mecca was a Yemeni entrepôt. With an irony that Bochart would appreciate, Hitti called the Yemenis "the Phoenicians of the Arabian Sea."[146] Whichever solution scholars have preferred, they have not struggled to imagine Ancient South Arabian speakers at Mecca.

MKRB became the favored etymology for Macoraba in the twentieth century. Early supporters included Frants Buhl and Leone Caetani;[147] even Halévy called it "very seductive."[148] It seemed to bind Mecca's antiquity, the success of its temple, the name given by Ptolemy, and (by abbreviation) the name that Muslims knew. Scholars may also have found Ancient South Arabian to be a relatively new and exciting resource for historical linguistics, inviting its recruitment to the study of early Islam. MKRB was endorsed in the second *Pauly* by Adolf Grohmann in 1928; again in the *Supplement* by Hermann von Wissmann in 1970; and once again in the *New Pauly* by Isabel Toral-Niehoff around the turn of the century.[149] It has remained the most commonly cited derivation for Macoraba, such that we may call it the consensus viewpoint, and scholars have continued to develop the hypothesis.

Grohmann himself tried to expand the MKRB hypothesis with reference to another source, the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (4th century CE). Among the "choicest cities" of Arabia, Ammianus had listed a certain *Geapolis*, which—said Grohmann—had a variant spelling as *Hierapolis* or "holy city." Grohmann argued that this name was a translation of MKRB, while Ptolemy's *Makoraba* was a transcription. "Evidently Mecca was not only an

145. Martin Hartmann, *Der Islamische Orient: Berichte und Forschungen*, vol. 2, *Die Arabische Frage, mit einem Versuche der Archäologie Jemens* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909), 121–122. On these migrations, see Harry Munt et al., "Arabic and Persian Sources for Pre-Islamic Arabia," in Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 434–500, 440–443.

146. Philip K. Hitti, *Capital Cities of Arab Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 4–5. Curiously, although he endorsed a "South Arabic (Sabaean)" derivation for Macoraba, Hitti reported that it meant "house of the Lord," which is not the meaning of MKRB. He may have believed (like al-Sharīf, discussed below) that the RB stood for *rabb*, an Arabic and ASA word for 'lord'. This is all the stranger for the fact that he had previously identified Macoraba as a "Sabaean" word for "sanctuary": Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: from the earliest times to the present*, 5th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1951), 103.

147. E.J. Simcox, *Primitive Civilizations*, vol. 1 (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894), 503 n. 2. Frants Buhl, *Muhammeds Liv* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1903), 117. Leone Caetani, *Annali dell' Islām*, vol. 1 (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1905), 97 n. 1. Henri Lammens, *L'Islam: croyances et institutions* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1926), 17.

148. His review of Glaser's *Skizze* in the *Revue des études juives* 19 (1889), 312–317.

149. Adolf Grohmann, "Makoraba," in Georg Wissowa et al. (eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: Neue Bearbeitung*, vol. 14/1, "Lysimachos–Mantike" (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1928), 807–808; Hermann von Wissmann, "Makoraba," in id., *Supplement*, vol. 12 (id., 1970), 792. Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "Macoraba," in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden: Brill, 1996—); consulted online on 26.06.18.

important site for trade and fairs deep in pre-Islamic times, but it also played a leading role in the cult."[150] However, Grohmann's argument is fatally undermined by the fact that—as Crone has pointed out—Ptolemy *also* mentions a place called *Gaia polis*.[151]

A more intriguing contribution was made in 1987 by Werner Daum, a student of contemporary Yemeni folklore. Every year, he reported, a community northeast of al-Ḥudaydah performed a ritual symbolizing the marriage of a local hero to the woman he had saved from a water demon. This was meant to encourage rainfall and fertility. The happy couple was represented by two poles daubed in henna and wrapped in cloth. Daum argued that the ritual had pre-Islamic roots in Sabaean theology. Furthermore, in the postscript to this article, he proposed that a similar tale might be encoded in the early Muslim legend of Isāf and Nāʾilah. According to the mythographer Hishām ibn al-Kalbī (d. *ca* 205/820), these two lovers came up from the Yemen long ago on pilgrimage to Mecca, where they had pre-marital sex in the Kaʿbah. They were turned to stone, whereupon the people, falling into idolatry, began to worship them. For Daum, this was evidence for a (half-remembered) Sabaean ritual at the Meccan temple before Islam. If Mecca was indeed Macoraba, and Macoraba was indeed a MKRB, then a MKRB "must be" a place where the sacred marriage was held.[152]

Macoraba has therefore been turned back on the study of the ancient Yemen. It has also been spun on a slightly different geographical axis. Some commentators have noted that MKRB is cognate with Ethiopic *mekʷerāb*, also "temple."[153] Consequently a few scholars— including A.J. Wensinck in the first and second *Encyclopaedia of Islam*—have supposed that Macoraba could be Ethiopic just as easily as Ancient South Arabian.[154] In 2012 Rosa Conte posited that Macoraba was an Ethiopian entrepôt, illustrating the tight sociolinguistic ties between Arabic and its neighbors.[155] Perhaps in the coming years other scholars will explore the interpretive potential of the Ethiopic hypothesis, but it has not yet seriously contended with Ancient South Arabian.

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150. Grohmann, "Makoraba." John C. Rolfe (tr.), *Ammianus Marcellinus*, vol. 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 1940) 374–377 (§23.6).

151. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 136 n. 18.

152. Werner Daum, "A Pre-Islamic Rite in South Arabia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1987), 5–14; Macoraba on 14.

153. Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 341. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 251–252. Federico Corriente, *Dictionary of Arabic and Allied Loanwords* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 375 n. 885.

154. Joseph Halévy, review of Glaser's *Skizze* in the *Revue des études juives* 19 (1889), 312–317; Frants Buhl, *Muhammeds Liv* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1903), 117. Arent Jan Wensinck s.v. "Kaʿba," in Martijn Theodoor Houtsma et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1913–1938); id. and Jacques Jomier s.v. "Kaʿba," in P.J. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (1960–2005). Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 155. Daniel C. Peterson, *Muhammad: Prophet of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 26 n. 45.

155. Rosa Conte, "Alcune considerazioni sulle lingue in uso presso gli Arabi," *Linguistica Zero* 5 (2012), 14–47, 21–22; citing August Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae Aethiopicae, cum indice Latino* (Leipzig: Theodor Oswald Weigel, 1865), 427, s.v. QRB; 836–837 s.v. KRB.

MKRB or MQRB?

The Ancient South Arabian root ᴋʀʙ bears a superficial resemblance to Arabic ǫʀʙ, to do with closeness, and by extension sacrifice.[156] The resemblance is so strong that ᴍᴋʀʙ has been occasionally misspelt with a ǫ. For example, in his *History of Islamic Peoples and States* (1939), Carl Brockelmann spelled the word "mikrab" in the original German, but in the English and Arabic translations, this was rendered "miqrab."[157] Unsurprisingly, then, attempts were made to interpret Macoraba with reference to the Arabic root ǫʀʙ.[158] The Indian scholar Muhammad Hamidullah observed in 1957 that the ᴍᴋʀʙ hypothesis "supports the tradition of the South Arabian origin of the Jurhumites, who were the first to inhabit Mecca," but he also declared that ᴍᴋʀʙ should be derived "from the Arabic *maqrab* = location of *qurb* or *qurbān*, i.e. altar, place of religious sacrifice."[159] Thus, for Hamidullah, Macoraba was an Ancient South Arabian word, but one that should be understood in light of its (purported) Arabic cognate.

A similar but distinct argument was posed by the Iraqi scholar Jawwād ʿAlī in his *Detailed History of the Arabs before Islam* (1951–1953). We know from inscriptions in Ancient South Arabian that the word ᴍᴋʀʙ signified not only a temple, but also a major official. The pronunciation is uncertain, but we may call this person a *mukarrib* for clarity's sake.[160] Scholars writing after ʿAlī have suggested that the *mukarrib* was a high king; ʿAlī supposed it was an arbitrator (*ḥākim*) of the sort that we find in the Hijaz before Islam. He speculated that the *mukarrib*'s justice was the justice of the gods, whose work effectively brought the people closer to the gods. In Arabic, a person who brings-things-closer would be a *muqarrib*, so ʿAlī posited that this was the true meaning of *mukarrib* in Ancient South Arabian. He then turned his attention to Mecca. Like the *mukarrib*, the town of Mecca brought people closer to the gods: it was a temple before Islam. ʿAlī observed that holy sites like Mecca tended to attract epithets: in Arabic, Jerusalem is known as "The Holy" and "The Holy Temple." Mecca

156. Of course, the same root ǫʀʙ also exists in ASA. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 465–466.

157. Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der islamischen Völker und Staaten* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977 [first printing 1939]), 11. Joel Carmichael and Moshe Perlmann (trs.), *History of the Islamic Peoples* (New York: Capricorn, 1960), 12. Nabīh Amīn Fāris and Munīr Baʿlabakkī (trs.), *Taʾrīkh al-Shuʿūb al-Islāmiyyah*, 5ᵗʰ ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-al-Malāyīn 1978 [first edition 1948]), 31.

158. Cf. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 136: "If Macoraba was located in an Arabic-speaking environment, its name is more likely to reflect an Arabic form such as *Muqarraba* than a derivation from South Arabian *krb*."

159. Muḥammad Ḥamidullah [sic], "Al-Īlāf, ou les rapports économico-diplomatiques de La Mecque pré-Islamique," in (no ed.) *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 293–311, 295.

160. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 251–252. A.F.L. Beeston et al. (eds.), *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), 78. On the official's function, see first of all A.F.L. Beeston, "Kingship in Ancient South Arabia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 15/3 (1972), 256–268, 264–265. However A.J. Drewes, "The Meaning of Sabaean ᴍᴋʀʙ, Facts and Fiction," *Semitica* 51 (2003), 93–125, prefers the vocalization *makrūb*, meaning 'blessed', and underlines how speculative and unsound much of the previous scholarship on this title has been.

would therefore have gained the epithet *al-Muqarribah*, the place that brings us closer to the gods.[161]

Great Valley (*Makā-rabā*) and Lord's Temple (*Makk-rabb*)

Though its interpretations have varied, MKRB has remained the most popular derivation for Macoraba. But we should acknowledge that there were other, less successful hypotheses put forward in the twentieth century.

When Brockelmann's *History* was translated to Arabic in 1948, a marginal note was added under MKRB to suggest a completely different etymology. The contributor who authored this note was ʿUmar Farrūkh, Professor of Philosophy at the Maqasid College in Beirut. Farrūkh related the name Bakkah to Baalbek in the Levant. Implausibly, he derived the element BK(K) from BQʿ, a Semitic root used for valleys. Baalbek would then be a Valley of the Lord (*baʿal*). Moreover, following Muslim tradition, he asserted that Bakkah was synonymous with Makkah. It would follow that Macoraba could be read as another Valley of the Lord (*rabb*), if not a Great (*rabbah*) Valley.

In Farrūkh's opinion, moreover, a Syriac derivation would explain how Ptolemy had spelt Macoraba. Most commentators have assumed that the "o" in Macoraba renders *a* or *ā*, but Farrūkh observed that a long *ā* would be pronounced in Syriac more like *ō*. Macoraba might therefore reflect *makō rabō* or the like.[162] But then a Syriac derivation would have other repercussions: "great" should be marked with a hard *t* in the feminine suffix (*rabtō*), whereas "of the Lord" should have a possessive marker (*d-rabō*).

Another peripheral hypothesis was advanced by Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf in his study on *Mecca and Medina* (1965). He observed, again, that Mecca had been inhabited by South Arabians; and he claimed that in Ancient South Arabian *makk* meant "house" or "temple," so Macoraba would be 'the Lord's Temple'.[163] However, al-Sharīf did not give a citation for this, and there is no apparent reason to think that *makk* should have meant "temple" in Ancient South Arabian.[164] Such a mistake would not be unprecedented: Jurjī Zaydān had once proposed that Mecca should be derived from an Akkadian word for temple, *makkā*,[165]

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161. Jawwād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Taʾrīkh al-ʿArab qabl al-Islām*, vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Baghdad: University of Baghdad, 1413/1993), 9–10.

162. ʿUmar Farrūkh in Fāris and Baʿlabakkī, *Taʾrīkh al-Shuʿūb al-Islāmiyyah*, 31 n.

163. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf, *Makkah wa-al-Madīnah fī al-Jāhiliyyah wa-ʿahd al-rasūl* (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-ʿarabī, 1965), 109, 112. One of his citations is Yāqūt, but as we have seen, Yāqūt's Mecca is not Ptolemy's Macoraba. Cf. a more recent popular history by Marcel Hulspas, *Mohammed en het Ontstaan van de Islam*, digital ed. (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2015), start of ch. 5: "The likeliest interpretation of the name 'Mecca' is that is it is derived from 'Mokarib', which in Sabaean means 'house of Almaka'." ʾLMQH was a prominent god in the South Arabian pantheon.

164. Cf. where one should expect to find the root MK(K): A.F.L. Beeston et al. (eds.), *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), 84–85. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 274.

165. Jurjī Zaydān, *Kitāb al-ʿArab qabl al-Islām*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Hilāl, 1922), 244. This has been unfortunately revived by Hanrī S. ʿAbbūdī, *Muʿjam al-Ḥaḍārāt al-Sāmiyyah* (Tripoli, Lebanon: Jarrūs, 1411/1991), 249.

but such a word does not obviously exist.[166] We should acknowledge that many scholars of the twentieth century labored without the dictionaries, databases and other resources at our disposal today. Without specialist knowledge of the ancient languages in question, they (or their unknown informants) could easily have misunderstood some detail in the previous literature.

Crone's Skepticism

Since Bochart's time, discussions about Macoraba have almost universally assumed that Mecca was an ancient city, far predating the rise of Islam. Indeed, the Victorian explorer James Hamilton believed that Mecca could be found in a relief from the 13th century BCE. It was installed by Ramses II at the temple of Beit el-Wali, Nubia, and depicts a gargantuan pharaoh and his prince attacking a fortress full of easterners. For Hamilton "the fortified city… is no other than Mecca, which under the name of Macoràba, existed in very early times, and was then a place of strength, though"—he admitted—"since the institution of Islam, it has been without walls."[167]

Western scholarship has largely followed the example of medieval Muslim historiography by projecting Mecca's significance into the distant past. There have been exceptions: in 1785 the historical geographer Paul Jakob Bruns insisted that Mecca could not have been a major town before Muḥammad, so if Macoraba was indeed "great Mecca," then it must have been a late interpolation into Ptolemy's work.[168] By and large, though, Western scholars have taken for granted that Mecca was a center of trade and pilgrimage long before Ptolemy's day.

This assumption was, however, tested in the later twentieth century, when the "revisionists" experimented with alternative paradigms for early Islam. As we have seen from the case of Günter Lüling, not all experiments were taken seriously, but as a whole they exposed the weaknesses of Orientalist positivism. Patricia Crone, a Danish scholar in the British and American systems, was arguably the most influential contributor to the paradigm shift.[169] Her monograph *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987) challenged the mainstream view that Mecca was a major node on the incense route;[170] not only that, but

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166. One may consult for example: Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate (eds.) *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000). Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, vol. 2, *M–S* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972). Miguel Civil et al. (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 10, *M*, parts 1–2 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1977; 3rd printing 2004).

167. (L'Abbé) James Hamilton, *Sinai, the Hedjaz, and Soudan: Wanderings* (London: Richard Bentley, 1857), 168–170; vaguely citing John Gardner Wilkinson, *Topography of Thebes, and General View of Egypt* (London: John Murray, 1835), 484–486. From their descriptions, this relief is very likely to be the one now interpreted as Ramses II storming a Syrian fortress: Herbert Ricke, George R. Hughes and Edward F. Wente, *The Beit El-Wali Temple of Ramesses II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 13 and plate 12.

168. Paul Jakob Bruns, *Handbuch der alten Erdbeschreibung*, vol. 2 part 1 (Nuremberg: Christoph Weigel and Schneider, 1785), 183–184.

169. See again Chase F. Robinson, "Crone and the End of Orientalism," 597–620.

170. For alternative views of the trading economy, see also Patricia Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army:

she argued that the scale of fictionalization in the Arabic historical tradition jeopardized any hope of understanding socioeconomic conditions in the Hijaz.

In keeping with her skeptical historiography, Crone maintained that Mecca was totally absent from the historical record before Islam. To this end, she revisited two of the *Pauly* contributors we have already encountered, Adolf Grohmann and Hermann von Wissmann, both of whom had tried to situate Mecca in the Roman sources.[171] Wissmann had argued that *Dabanegoris regio* in Pliny's *Natural History* was the "region of the Quraysh," Muḥammad's tribe, which Crone rightly dismissed;[172] but the other hypotheses to hand all centered on Macoraba. Crone therefore wrote the first (and perhaps the only) noteworthy refutation of Macoraba-as-Mecca.[173]

The coordinates were incorrect, she observed, Macoraba being further east than Mecca; and Pliny's *portus Mochorbae*, which Glaser had construed as the port for Macoraba, was far southeast of both. She correctly identified *Makkah rabbah* as the earliest derivation, and called it "most implausible." It could not be Arabic, nor was there an attested Arabic equivalent for "great Mecca" along the lines of *Makkah al-kubrā*; and the comparison with Rabbath-Moab and Rabbath-Ammon was "false inasmuch as these names are constructs," while *Makkah rabbah* was not.

Moving on to MKRB, she protested again that it was not Arabic; even if it were, it would lack the feminine suffix to account for the final vowel in Macoraba.[174] She also rebuffed Grohmann's contribution—that MKRB was translated to *Hierapolis* and misspelt as *Geapolis* in manuscripts of Ammianus—by showing that *Gaia polis* was also listed separately by Ptolemy. Furthermore, Crone did not accept that MKRB could have been abbreviated to *Makkah*, since the geminated *k* in *Makkah* should rather imply the root MKK.[175] "It follows

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Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70/1 (2007), 63–88; Gene W. Heck, "'Arabia without Spices': An Alternate Hypothesis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123/3 (2003), 547–576.

171. Grohmann, "Makoraba;" Wissmann, "Makoraba."

172. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2, 450–451 (§6.32). Wissmann's argument was approved by Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 351; and refuted by Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 134–135. Wissmann read *Dabanegoris regio* as an Ancient South Arabian construct: ᴅʙɴ QR(Y)š, 'that which belongs to the Banū Quraysh'. However, Pliny puts this region in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula; the Arabic historical tradition would not lead us to think that the Quraysh were established at Mecca at such an early date; and the patronymic *Banū Quraysh* is not known to have existed. We may add that his reading is extrapolated from what seems to be a genitive declension in the Latin, whereas we might expect the native Arabian name to be more accurately reflected in the nominative, perhaps **Dabanegos*.

173. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 134–137.

174. This objection is probably her weakest, because Ancient Greek has been known to affix a final vowel to foreign toponyms for the sake of euphony, as in Lathrippa for Yathrib.

175. Indeed, it has never been adequately demonstrated how the name Mecca could have evolved from MKRB. This problem was noted as early as Carlo Landberg, *Études sur les dialectes de l'Arabie méridionale*, vol. 2, part 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1909), 642–643 n. Federico Corriente has argued for the influence of *tarkhīm*—an Arabic phenomenon where names that follow a vocative particle are shortened—coupled with "the instability of labial consonants in South Arabian" and "of sonorant phonemes" in general. These suggestions are quite ingenious, but they raise other questions: how often do Arabian toponyms undergo such phonetic erosion through the historical record, and how *in practice* should a vocative form overcome and dislodge the nominative? Federico

that Ptolemy would be referring to a sanctuary town which was *not* called Mecca. Why then identify the two?"[176]

Having cast doubt on Macoraba, Crone went on to ask why so much effort had been spent to find Mecca in ancient Roman sources, while the Late Antique sources in the run-up to Islam bear no trace of it. Even after the Muslim conquerors had brought word of Mecca to the outside world, the earliest references to Mecca and the Muslim temple would display "not the faintest trace of *recognition.*"[177] It was not enough to secure Mecca's place in ancient sources, in Crone's opinion, for one should then have to explain the centuries of silence between Ptolemy and Muḥammad.

Crone's skepticism was reasoned and parsimonious. In particular, she cast light on two crucial problems which had scarcely ever been acknowledged. First, if Mecca were attested in Classical Antiquity and again during the Muslim Conquests, we should expect to find it in Late Antiquity. Second, the leading derivations for Macoraba have resorted to languages outside of Mecca itself. Macoraba is anomalous in time and space: have we been grasping at straws? Yet Crone's distinctive treatment of the Macoraba problem did not stimulate a reassessment in wider scholarship. Even in the twenty-first century, the old consensus reigns with confidence: "By the time of Ptolemy (...who called the city *Macoraba*), Mecca was already[!] an ancient commercial center and a place where the followers of numerous idolatrous sects in pre-Islamic Arabia gathered at specified times of the year for the pilgrimage to the Kaʿba."[178] Crone's robust counterarguments have barely registered.[179]

Accessibility was surely a problem. The unfamiliar researcher would have assumed that *Meccan Trade* was about Meccan trade; few would have thought to consult it for Crone's thoughts on Ptolemy. The book was controversial, which helped to generate new scholarship, but on the other hand its notoriety may still deter a more casual readership.[180] And even if someone did happen to see Macoraba in the index, they would find the case presented over just four pages, all in Crone's dense and demanding style, in service of much heavier theses on historiography, socioeconomics, and new religious movements. It takes more than a glancing blow to break a beloved consensus.

Corriente, "On a proposal for a 'Syro-Aramaic' reading of the Qurʾān," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1 (2003), 305–314, 314 n. 24; cf. id., *Introducción a la gramática comparada del Semítico meridional* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1996), 16. On *tarkhīm*, see Wolfdietrich Fischer, tr. Jonathan Rodgers, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 96 §159.

176. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 135–136.

177. Ibid., 137.

178. Edward D.A. Hulmes s.v. "Mecca," in Ian Richard Netton (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 401.

179. F.E. Peters did approve Crone's skepticism, albeit in a footnote in his "Introduction" to id. (ed.), *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), xxx n. 78.

180. There was even a dissertation on the subject of Meccan trade, not long after Crone's book, which made a conscious choice not to engage with her arguments, citing a famously negative review by a well-regarded Arabist. Salamah Salih Sulayman Aladieh (diss.), *Meccan Trade prior to the Rise of Islam* (Durham: University of Durham, 1991), xlvii–xlviii; R. B. Serjeant, "Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam: Misconceptions and Flawed Polemics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110/3 (1990), 472–486. Cf. Crone's response, "Serjeant and Meccan Trade," *Arabica*, 39/2 (1992), 216–240.

Macoraba after Crone

When historians did address Crone's opinion on Macoraba, it was therefore in defense of the trade-route paradigm that *Meccan Trade* had aspired to overturn. In a 2010 article, Mikhail D. Bukharin argued that the classical trade in spice and incense endured through Late Antiquity, passing through the immediate environs of Mecca itself. Although "one cannot speak of a Meccan supremacy in the perfume trade," Bukharin inferred that Mecca was a market town in the peninsular network.[181] He reiterated that Macoraba was the name by which Mecca was known to outsiders; but this was unlikely to have been Ancient South Arabian, in Bukharin's judgment, since the (unaspirated) Greek letter *kappa* "rarely corresponds" to the (aspirated) Semitic letter *kāf*.[182] Bukharin preferred a derivation from Arabic *Maghrib*, "West," signaling Mecca's location in the Peninsula.[183]

We should credit Bukharin for this new application of historical linguistics to the Macoraba problem. If the *k* in *Makoraba* seldom represents the *k* in Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician, that should threaten not only MKRB, but older derivations like "great Mecca" and "great slaughter." Bochart's unique idea to read Mecca into Macoraba would stumble at the first hurdle. Yet it seems to me that Bukharin drew the wrong conclusion: rather than abandoning the consensus view that Macoraba must be Mecca, he fashioned yet another derivation to bridge the two names.

This would underestimate the strength of Crone's arguments. Suppose that Ptolemy *had* recorded a town called *Maghrib* to the southeast of Yathrib. Such a town would have different coordinates and a different name from Mecca; and Mecca itself would not be attested in the historical record for another half a millennium. To borrow Crone's rhetoric: "It follows that Ptolemy would be referring to a [market] town which was *not* called Mecca. Why then identify the two?"[184] Still, this has been the guiding principle of scholarship on Macoraba since 1646: it is better to spin off new derivations than to question the fundamental assumption that Macoraba is Mecca.

Following Bukharin came G.W. Bowersock in his monograph *The Crucible of Islam* (2017). Bowersock agreed that Mecca was a "natural destination" for traffic on the caravan route; and if the scale of trade has been "exaggerated" in the past, it was still greater than Crone has allowed.[185] To highlight Mecca's reputation within the trade network, he affirmed that Macoraba was Mecca. He cited Bukharin to that end; and like Bukharin, he was unconvinced

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181. Mikhail D. Bukharin, "Mecca on the Caravan Routes in Pre-Islamic Antiquity," in Angelika Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 115–134, 131.

182. Semitic *kāf* was more often perceived by Greek speakers as their aspirated letter *chi*, so that for example the Arabic name Malik would be transcribed in Greek as *Melech* rather than *Melek*. This negative comparison had already been drawn, with abundant examples, by Maxime Rodinson, "Sur la prononciation ancienne du *qāf* arabe," in David Cohen (ed.), *Mélanges Marcel Cohen* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 298–319, 304–15, 318.

183. Bukharin, "Mecca on the Caravan Routes," 122.

184. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 135–136.

185. Glen Warren Bowersock, *The Crucible of Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 49–53.

by MKRB and its Ethiopic cognate, reasoning that the Ka'bah was a shrine for pilgrimage as opposed to a temple for congregation.

Bowersock preferred the older derivation from "great Mecca." Again he drew the comparison with Rabbath-Moab, declaring that the foreign element *rabbah* could have "easily seeped into the local language through the Jews we know to have been in Yathrib and elsewhere." Crone was wrong to demand an Arabic derivation "despite the absence of Arabic toponyms in this period," and if there was no "great Mecca" in later Arabic sources, there was at least a "correlative, reverential adjective" in the term *Makkah al-mukarramah*, "noble Mecca." He even supported Adolf Grohmann's idea that Mecca was *Geapolis* in Ammianus Marcellinus on the tenuous grounds that *Gaia polis* in Ptolemy is two words, while *Geapolis* is just one; therefore these are two separate places, and *Geapolis* is free to be identified with Macoraba instead.[186]

Despite Crone's warning, Bowersock did not account for the fact that Rabbath-Moab is a construct, unlike *Makkah rabbah*; and though he conceded to Crone's reasoning that an Arabic counterpart would help his case, his solution, "noble Mecca," is both late and a semantic step removed. Nor did he consider Bukharin's objection to reading Greek *kappa* as Semitic *kāf*. Most troubling is the need, again, for a foreign diaspora to yield the building blocks for Macoraba. Bowersock may be right that Arabic toponyms are unattested for Ptolemy's era: that problem absolutely deserves to be part of the conversation, and it might even weigh against Bukharin's *Maghrib*.[187] In itself, though, it cannot justify the recruitment of languages from outside Mecca.

In Late Antiquity the Jewish diaspora is well attested for the northwest[188] and the southwest of Arabia.[189] It is not attested for the region in between; not even at Mecca, where we might expect to find reminiscences of a Jewish settlement in the Arabic historical tradition. Moreover, the roots of this diaspora cannot be traced with confidence. Medieval and modern scholars have often adduced the Hebrew Bible, seeing the potential for migration in the "ten lost tribes," the fall of the First Temple, and the various military

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186. Bowersock, *Crucible of Islam*, 53–55 and nn.

187. Inscriptions that may be considered Old Arabic are concentrated further north than Mecca itself, maybe suggesting a late spread of Arabic from the Syrian frontier down through the Peninsula. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 61–62. That said, as the study of ancient Arabia continues to grow, rapidly assimilating newly documented epigraphic sources, the state of the field may change unpredictably in the coming years.

188. Michael Lecker, "Waqidi's Account on the Status of the Jews of Medina: A Study of a Combined Report," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54 (1995), 15–32. Robert Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qurʾān and in their Inscriptions," in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2* (Abingdon: Routledge 2011), 91–116. Haggai Mazuz, "Northern Arabia and its Jewry in Early Rabbinic Sources: More than Meets the Eye," *Antiguo Oriente* 13 (2015), 149–168.

189. Christian Julien Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence," in Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 127–171, esp. 129–137. Michael Lecker, "Judaism among Kinda and the *Ridda* of Kinda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995), 635–650. For both ends of the Peninsula, see moreover the compendious chapter by Christian Julien Robin, "Quel Judaïsme en Arabie?," in id. (ed.), *Le Judaïsme de l'Arabie antique* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 15–295.

campaigns against the southern neighbors of Israel and Judah. Yet there is little else to support Jewish settlement along the Peninsula before the Second Temple fell in 70 CE, and it is a matter of controversy to what extent the Late Antique communities were descendants of Jewish settlers or merely converts.[190]

That is to say, in the centuries before Ptolemy there may or may not have been Jewish communities in the Hijaz, and we can only speculate whether they might have lent a new title to Mecca, where they are not themselves known to have lived. Bowersock's argument may be bolder than the evidence allows. More broadly, any argument that reads Northwest Semitic *rabbah* into Macoraba should ideally be able to find other toponyms in the Hijaz that also bear this element. Otherwise it may be hard to credit that ancient Mecca uniquely shared a naming convention with towns in the far Levant.

If the Jewish communities of Arabia cannot explain *Makkah rabbah*, they may yet have ramifications for the MKRB hypothesis. Since Glaser's time it has been widely assumed that a MKRB was a pagan temple, serving the native cult of Ancient South Arabia. But as Christian Robin has observed, there is good reason to believe that a MKRB is properly a Jewish synagogue. All datable inscriptions that use the word are within the period of Jewish ascendancy over the Yemen, roughly 350–500 CE; and wherever a MKRB is documented, the context may be read as Jewish or at least Judaizing.[191]

Bukharin and Bowersock have both acknowledged that the word MKRB could mean a synagogue, and while it does not overtly factor into their decision to reject MKRB as a derivation for Macoraba, it certainly could.[192] It is one thing to situate a pagan MKRB in faraway Mecca, the site of a pagan temple according to Muslim tradition; it is quite another thing to put a Jewish MKRB in the same place, where no Jewish communities are attested. Chronology is also a problem, since the word can only be dated to the Jewish period in the Yemen, starting around two hundred years after Ptolemy was writing. The MKRB hypothesis, which has predominated over the twentieth century, may no longer be tenable, in which case Bukharin and Bowersock may herald a general departure from that derivation in the century to come.

Macoraba and the Holy Hill

Here end some 370 years of speculative etymology. There is however one more contribution that we should address. In his monograph *The Arabs in Antiquity* (2003), Jan Retsö has proposed that the medieval Arabic historical tradition bears the dim recollection of a place called Macoraba.[193] Retsö pointed to the ninth-century Meccan historian

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190. Robin, "Quel Judaïsme en Arabie?," 160–174. Moshe Gil, "The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 203–224. Gordon Darnell Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: from Ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), ch. 2, "Legends and Ancient Origins," 14–23.

191. Robin, "Quel Judaïsme en Arabie?," 122–126.

192. Bukharin, "Mecca on the Caravan Routes," 122. Bowersock, *Crucible of Islam*, 54.

193. Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their history from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 450 n. 61.

Muḥammad al-Azraqī and his *Accounts of Mecca*, which incorporates legends about the Kaʿbah in ancient times. Al-Azraqī relates:[194]

> The site of the Kaʿbah vanished and perished in the flood between Noah and Abraham. Its site was a hill of red clay which the deluge did not submerge. Yet the people knew that the temple was located there, even though it was not confirmed. Those who were oppressed and sought protection came from all over the world and called out to it "*al-makrūb*!;" there were few who called out like this whom it did not answer.

Retsö inferred that al-Azraqī did not understand the meaning of *al-makrūb* in this passage. Usually a *makrūb* is someone anxious and troubled; the root has many unrelated applications according to the medieval lexicographers, but none can be said to obviously fit this text.[195] The word's use here seems to be arcane. Retsö's implication was that *al-makrūb* could be the ancient name Macoraba, passed orally down the generations.

This was ostensibly a Meccan legend reported by a Meccan writer, which affords the matter some evidential weight that has been lacking in the more hypothetical discussions of etymology. Still, we should reserve serious doubt whether we can relate *al-makrūb* to Macoraba. Their morphologies are quite different—it is hard to find the long vowel *ū* in Ptolemy's spelling—and we have seen that Semitic *kāf* is relatively unlikely to be rendered as Greek *kappa*. Most pressing is whether a story about the holiest site in the young religion, a story that is already obscure by the time it reaches our source, has much historical value.

Among the problems explored by Crone's *Meccan Trade* is the fraught relationship between pre-Islamic Arabia and early Muslim historiography.[196] The medieval accounts have been weathered by literary forces for so long and with such intensity that the least conspicuous of details are brought into question. Characters are swapped in and out; narremes are relocated to new environments; law and exegesis grow in dialectic with historical reminiscence. This activity is most energetic where the storytellers had the most interest: in the composition of the Qurʾan, the biography of Muḥammad, and the history of the Meccan cult. An opaque word in a tradition of *Heilsgeschichte* may prove too ephemeral to link up with a toponym attested seven hundred years earlier, and possibly older than that, depending on Ptolemy's sources. Those who are sanguine about the Arabic tradition's historicity would do well to consider this anecdote in their treatments of Macoraba; others should tread carefully.

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194. Muḥammad al-Azraqī, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* [*Akhbār Makkah*], vol. 1. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1858), 20.

195. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 7 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1885), 2602–2603, s.v. ᴋʀʙ. A.J. Drewes, "The Meaning of Sabaean ᴍᴋʀʙ, Facts and Fiction," *Semitica* 51 (2003), 93–125.

196. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 203–230. Cf. ead., *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), ch. 1, "Historical Introduction," 3–17.

Conclusion

Medieval scholars never identified Mecca with Macoraba. This idea was one of the many fruits of early modern historical geography, where it was first adduced as evidence for the Phoenician diaspora. The Phoenician hypothesis did not catch on, but Macoraba was now credibly established as a candidate for ancient Mecca. In the eighteenth century the identification found its way into encyclopedias, and in the nineteenth it was common knowledge among Orientalists and Classicists. Since then, it has been almost universally accepted that Macoraba is Mecca.

Given the scale of agreement on this basic fact, we should be astounded at the variety of interpretations which have been brought to bear. Macoraba has been variously decoded as a great battlefield, great Mecca, Mecca of the Arabs, city of the Malik, city of the Ḥarb, city of the West, valley of the Lord, house of the Lord, a place of sacrifice, a place that brings us closer to the gods, and a temple; derived from Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Phoenician, Akkadian, Hebrew, and Ancient South Arabian. If that language is not attested for ancient West Arabia, the reason is that foreigners conquered, founded or traded at Mecca, or else cultural diffusion carried it from a neighboring empire; and this occurred sometime over the millennium between King Solomon and Claudius Ptolemy.

The remarkable plasticity of Macoraba speaks not to the strength of its central claim, but to its extreme weakness. These derivations are often adduced to show that Mecca was a prominent site for religion or trade long before Islam.[197] In practice, though, scholars have *assumed* that Mecca had such a history, they have *assumed* that Mecca was Macoraba, and they have gone looking for etymologies to cohere with those assumptions. It is telling that after 370 years of experimentation we now have a range of incompatible derivations, none of which fits.

It is also telling that the most elaborate hypotheses—such as Sprenger's *Mariaba Baramalacum* and Dozy's Israelite invasion—have been roundly ignored or scorned. Solutions to the Macoraba problem are more likely to be accepted the less generative they are; the less they actually explain anything. If the Phoenicians did not coin "great Mecca," then it could easily have been the Jews; if the MKRB was not founded by southern migrants, they could easily have been southern merchants. The discourse on Macoraba has favored rationalization *ad hoc* over the kind of integrative world-building that might yield a coherent, rigorous account of the ancient Hijaz.

The failure to build a cumulative line of research on Macoraba is a symptom of its exposition in the scholarly discourse: it is a common but marginal presence in our literature.

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197. E.g. Mircea Eliade, tr. Alf Hiltebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 3, *From Muhammad to the Age of Reforms* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 63–64: "Mecca (Makkah) was the religious center. This name is mentioned in the Ptolemaic Corpus (second century A.D.) as Makoraba, a word derived from the Sabaean Makuraba, 'sanctuary.' In other words, from its beginning Mecca was a ceremonial center around which a city progressively arose." Walter Dostal, "Mecca before the Time of the Prophet: Attempt of an Anthropological Interpretation," *Der Islam* 68/2 (1991), 193–231, 194 n. 1: "…a corresponding term 'makoraba' could be found in the Sabaic word for holy place, temple 'mukariba'… This indication shows that a familiar cult center must have been situated in the area of Mecca, otherwise Ptolemaeus would have made no mention of it."

To my knowledge, no extensive study has ever been devoted to Macoraba; no book or article has teased out the implications of each hypothesis. All conversation has been held in the footnotes, paragraphs and subsections of diverse studies, which recruit Macoraba to any and all narratives; or else in authoritative but incomplete encyclopedia entries, which serve to narrow our vision to a consensus viewpoint. Because there has never been a full survey of literature on the Macoraba problem, we have never seen how dissonant and creative it is: the historiography of Macoraba is an embarrassment of riches.

If not Mecca, what *is* Macoraba? There is no obvious candidate. Despite major advances in epigraphical studies, many of the names in Ptolemy's Arabia remain unfamiliar to us. Here and there we can try to infer their identity from the details of geography, but often, Ptolemy's imprecise coordinates and partial commentary do not leave us enough to work with. We should acknowledge the length of timescales involved. Alexandrians had been studying the trade routes (*periploi*) of Arabia since Eratosthenes (d. 194 BCE);[198] it is possible that Ptolemy learned the name Macoraba from the merchants of his own day, but equally, his sources may have been very old indeed. The town may have perished or lost its name centuries before or centuries after Ptolemy wrote it down. As one commentator has warned, "many well-known towns of our day are recent, or in any case late to emerge, while famous towns of ancient times were either destroyed or reduced to mediocrity."[199]

The case for Macoraba-as-Mecca now seems arbitrary and fragile, but future investigations may still recover it. We cannot prove a negative; and if this article does not break the consensus, it should at least raise the standards of evidence and argumentation. A strong case for Macoraba would account for the discrepancy between that ancient name and the medieval name for Mecca; it would test any derivation against our current knowledge of historical linguistics; it would situate Macoraba within a rigorous account of peoples and their languages in the ancient Hijaz; and it would explain why the town fell into obscurity for half a millennium until the rise of Islam. Without these conditions, Macoraba's identity can only be conjecture. Patricia Crone would seem to be vindicated.

And for now, we do not *need* Macoraba to write the history of Mecca. No other ancient source has been shown to describe the town or its temple;[200] and in the centuries before

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198. Fragments of his work, recovered from various ancient writers, are published in translation by Duane W. Roller, *Eratosthenes' Geography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010); see index under "Arabia" and "Arabia Eudaimon." For commentary, see moreover Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 301–308.

199. Johann David Michaelis, *Spicilegium Geographiae Hebraeorum Exterae, post Bochartum*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1780), 211–212. Michaelis was opposing the identification of Macoraba with Mesha, given the length of time between Ptolemy's *Geography* and Moses' *Genesis*.

200. Edward Gibbon thought he had found the Kaʿbah in an early description of the Red Sea coast, transmitted by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BCE) from a report by Agatharchides of Cnidus (2nd century BCE). The report mentioned a temple that was sacred to "all Arabians." "The character and position are so correctly apposite," wrote Gibbon, "that I am surprised how this curious passage should have been read without notice or application." But Gibbon had *misread* the passage: he placed the temple "between the Thamudites and the Sabæans," but it was actually between the Thamūd and the Gulf of Aqabah, near a bay on the northwestern coast. This mistake has persisted in popular histories, but specialists have largely ignored it. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5 (London: Andrew Strahan & Thomas Cadell, 1788), 190–191 and n. 45. C.H. Oldfather (tr.), *Diodorus of Sicily*, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1967), 216–217.

Islam, none of our Late Antique sources refers to Mecca, nor to Muḥammad's tribe, the Quraysh.[201] The town's oral history disintegrates into biblicizing legend sometime before the Quraysh take control, and since the oral tradition has no chronology to speak of, it may be impossible to date the earliest reminiscences.[202] Arabic poetry from the sixth and seventh centuries refers to Mecca and its pilgrimage, but this is largely confined to poets from the Hijaz, celebrating the Quryash; it is not clear that Mecca was known and venerated across the Peninsula, even during Muḥammad's lifetime.[203] The town came to prominence only after the rise of Islam, and even then its two most conspicuous markers, the direction of prayer and the rites of pilgrimage, were negotiated with other sites during the seventh century.[204] Mecca's place in Arabian sacred geography was neither ancient nor immutable.

With cognate accounts, in translation: Stanley Mayer Burstein (ed.), *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1989), 152–153. On Diodorus and his source Agatharchides see also Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 295–300. For recent examples of this argument in popular history, along with Macoraba, see Ziauddin Sardar, *Muhammad: All That Matters* (London: Hodder, 2012), 26; Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 96.

201. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 137–138. Stephen of Byzantium (fl. 6th century) in his geographical dictionary, the *Ethnika*, has entries for both Jurhum (Gorama) and Thamūd, but neither Quryash nor Mecca. Augustus Meineke (ed.), *Stephani Byzantii Ethnicorum quae supersunt*, vol. 1 (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1849), 211, 306. And, as F.E. Peters has noted, Byzantine writers like Procopius (d. *ca.* 560) in their reports on Arabia say nothing about Mecca, Macoraba, or the Quraysh: the "Introduction" to F.E. Peters (ed.), *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), xxi. We should note in passing the inscription Ja 919 / RES 4862 at al-ʿUqlah, which records a visit by some Arabian women affiliated to a place or people called QRŠ. It was inscribed for Ilʿazz Yaluṭ, who reigned probably in the early third century. The modern editor supposed that QRŠ was Quraysh, and Wissmann concurred; but that would leave an uncomfortable gap of three or four centuries until the Quraysh are next attested. The identification is therefore tentative at best. Wissmann, "Makoraba;" citing Albert W.F. Jamme, *The al-ʿUqlah Texts* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 37–39.

202. For the sixth century the most common reference for calculating dates is the 'Year of the Elephant'. Yet the triangulation of Muḥammad's birthdate against this semi-legendary event gave rise to a great many conflicting opinions: at the extremes, he was said to have been born fifteen years beforehand and seventy years after. M.J. Kister, "The Sons of Khadija," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 16 (1993), 59–95, esp. 81 n. 100. If this is the state of sixth-century chronology, there is little hope of schematizing the more distant past. On the slow and contentious elaboration of chronology within the Arabic historical tradition, see Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton N.J.: Darwin, 1998), ch. 10, "Chronology and the Development of Chronological Schemes" and its Appendix, 230–254; Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1995), ch. 12, "Chronology," 189–214.

203. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 82–83; Nathaniel Ashton Miller (diss.), *Tribal Poetics in Early Arabic Culture: The Case of Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 103–105.

204. Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 223–228.

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