

The History of the Ka'ba

Introduction

It is our belief that al-Makka al-Mukarrama is one of the most blessed places on earth. Situated in the deserts of Saudi Arabia, Makka has been a centre point for Islam since the time of Adam (peace be upon him). The place has been blessed with thousands of prophets and messengers.

Makka is important to us simply because it is important to our Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It was his birthplace and a place he loved dearly. He was born only yards away from the Ka'ba Sharif. On the occasion of the Migration, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah stood on the outskirts of the city and with a tearful eye remarked:

'By Allah! Of all of Allah's land, you are the most beloved to me. And in the eyes of Allah you are the most beloved land. And if your inhabitants never expelled me, I would never have left you.'¹

In the Qur'an, Allah has mentioned this city by name and through honourable titles. One of them is Umm al-Qura, meaning the 'mother of all cities.' The other names are Makka (48: 24), Bakkah (3: 96), al-Balad (14: 25), al-Balad al-Amin (95: 31), al-Balda (27: 91), Haram Amin (28: 57) and Ma'ad (28: 85).

Perhaps there is no better symbol to represent Islam than the Ka'ba Sharif. A cube building of simple design, it never fails to mesmerize the sights of visitors. For thousands of years, it has been divinely protected and preserved by Allah. Since Ibrahim's days (peace be upon him), approximately four thousand years ago, the Ka'ba has remained standing in the same location, unchanged in basic form and on the same foundation.

Each and every day, Muslims in all corners of the earth turn their faces towards the Ka'ba Sharif. It is our Qibla. We, the Muslim Ummah, are different in location, culture, language, practices, food and leisure, yet we all united in our allegiance to the Ka'ba Sharif.

Right above the Ka'ba on earth, there is a Ka'ba in the heavens called al-Bayt al-Ma'mur, a place our Beloved Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) visited on the occasion of al-Isra wa'l Mi'raj. He informed us that each and every day, 70,000 angels perform the Tawaf around al-Bayt al-Ma'mur, and never return there ever again.

Prayer at the Sacred Mosque in Makka (and indeed al-Madina) is different to any other prayer. Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'One prayer

¹ *Zia al-Nabi*, Pir M. Karam Shah, III: 61.

in my mosque is better than one thousand prayers in any other mosque, except the Sacred Mosque.'

In the Qur'an, Allah takes an oath with this blessed city, not once but twice (in Surah al-Balad and Surah al-Tin). Allah has also protected this city, like he has protected al-Madina. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'There is no city in which Dajjal will be unable to enter, besides Makkah and al-Madina. Every street will be lined with angels standing in rows to protect them.'²

The city of Makkah

The city of Makkah had strong importance even before the appearance of Islam. Bakka (Baca) is mentioned in the Psalms of Dawud (Zabur):

Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well.' (Psalms, 84: 5, 6).

The man whose strength is in God is evidently Ibrahim and the well being referred to is the well of Zamzam.³

Religion aside, the city of Makka was famous. The city was the crossroad for two major caravan routes. One was the 'incense route', from Central Asia and Iran through Makkah to the Mediterranean basin. The other route crossed from Central Asia and Iran through the Arabic steppe to Africa.⁴ Zamzam helped Makkah to cement itself as an important stopping point.

In the Qur'an Allah says,

'The first house ever built for the people was that of Bakka, a blessed place and a guidance for the people. In it there are manifest signs, the station of Ibrahim. Whoever enters it is safe. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God from mankind, for all who are able to make the journey (3: 96-7).

Muslims believe that geographically speaking, Makka is the centre of the earth. Nowadays, there is plenty of scientific material to prove this very fact, that indeed Makka is the centre. Scientists and mathematicians talk of a 'Golden Ratio Point'. Two quantities are in the same golden ratio if their ratio is the same as the ratio of their sum to the larger of the two quantities. This ratio is 1.618. The ratio of Makka in relation to the North and South Pole is exactly .618.

² *The History of Makkah Mukarramah*, Dr. M. Ilyas Abdul Ghani, p. 16.

³ *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 113.

⁴ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, p. 12.

The history of the Ka'ba: from the time of Adam to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them)

The location of the House has been known since the very beginning of time. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) affirmed – like the Qur'an – that the Ka'ba was the first place of worship on earth and added more detail. Abu Dharr asked the Messenger: 'O Messenger of Allah! Which mosque was placed first on earth?' He said: 'The Sacred Mosque.' He asked, 'then which? The Messenger replied, 'then the Furthest Mosque.' Abu Dharr asked, 'How long was there between the two?' He replied, 'forty years.'⁵

When Allah told the angels 'I am going to make a vicegerent on earth' they replied, 'A vicegerent from other than us to spread mischief and shed blood?' Allah was displeased and so they all sought protection, rushing to His throne. There, they circled it and prayed to Allah at the same time. Allah was happy with their actions and so He told them 'Build a house on earth to which those with whom I am displeased with take refuge, make Tawaf around it in the way you did Tawaf around the Arsh so that I will forgive them just like I have forgiven you. Hence they built the Ka'ba.⁶ According to another account, Allah instructed them to build a replica of al-Bayt al-Ma'mur on earth. All this was before Adam (peace be upon him) was created.

When **Adam** (peace be upon him) was sent down, he was instructed to build the house of Allah on the foundations laid down by the angels, and do perform Tawaf around it. When he finished, he was instructed, 'O Adam! This is My House, so circulate it and pray as you have seen My angels circling My Throne and praying.'⁷

In the time of **Nuh** (peace be upon him), the entire world was flooded and so Allah withdrew the Ka'ba to the heavens. However, its foundations remained.

Ibrahim and **Isma'il** (peace be upon them) were the ones who built the Ka'ba, an undisputed fact amongst the People of the Book. They rebuilt an irregular trapezoid shape, 36 metres long in the north-west, 23 metres in the south-west, 23 metres wide and nine metres high.⁸

When Ibrahim left his family in Makka, he made the following request to Allah 'Our Lord! I have settled my progeny in a valley devoid of vegetation, near Your Sacred House' (14: 37). This verse indicates that he knew where the House was to be, though he had not started physically re-building it.

Unfortunately, the idolators turned the Ka'ba into a place of stone-worship. The interior walls were covered with 'sacred' stones, idols and other skeletal objects

⁵ *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 117.

⁶ *The Sacred Lands*, p. 25.

⁷ *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 117.

⁸ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 44-5.

of pagan worship. On the ceiling and columns of the Ka'ba hung pictures of prophets, angels, idols and trees. All of these were removed in the Islamic era.⁹

The Zabur (Psalms) shows evidence that **Dawud** (peace be upon him) also visited Makka and expressed his love for this place:

‘Lord, I have loved the habitation of your House and the place where your honour dwells (Psalms, 26: 8).’¹⁰

The House here refers to the Ka'ba. It cannot refer to the Temple of Jerusalem because that was built later, by Dawud's son Sulayman (peace be upon him).

In fact, the Ka'ba is said to be the burial grounds of thousands of prophets and messengers.

By the time of **Prophet Muhammad** (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the Ka'ba had become infested with stones and idols. It also sustained considerable damage. At that time, the Ka'ba was made of large blocks of stones with no mortar and rose in 27 cubits high. Flash floods would happen occasionally and this would cause damage to the walls. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was twenty-five years old when sparks leaped from the incense burner of a woman burning incense near the Ka'ba causing its cloth cover to catch fire. The House was badly damaged.

The leaders of Quraysh decided to rebuild the House. Despite their wrongful beliefs, they resolved that they would only use lawful and plain money for the construction work.¹¹ When a Byzantine ship was wrecked near Jeddah, they thought they might use the timber from it to roof the House. The owner was a Greek man (Baaqum) and he agreed with Quraysh, on the condition that they carry his merchandise to Syria with their caravans.¹²

At first, Quraysh were skeptical about the project because they did not want to earn the wrath of God. After all, they all knew very well what happened to Abraha when he wanted to destroy the Ka'ba (the Year of the Elephant). Eventually, al-Walid ibn al-Mughira volunteered. He took a pick-axe, loudly proclaimed before God his intentions to do no harm and then began to demolish the walls of the Ka'ba. Quraysh watched carefully through the night, expecting divine retaliation but nothing happened. So the rest of the men began helping him.

Once they had reached the level at which the Black Stone was to be placed, they fell into disagreement as to which clan should have the honour. The tension mounted to the point they were prepared to fight. Finally, they decided that the first man to walk into the sanctuary should choose. This was none other than Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Makkans

⁹ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 45.

¹⁰ Cited in *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 118.

¹¹ *The History of Makkah Mukarramah*, Dr. M. Ilyas Abdul Ghani, p. 57.

¹² Cited in *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 124.

were overjoyed to see him. He asked them for a cloak and asked each clan member to hold the corners with the Stone in the middle. They all lifted the cloak and Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself placed the stone on the Ka'ba.¹³ They finished the building, but ran out of money leaving it only 18 cubits high and a few cubits less in breadth.

The Ka'ba after the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

17 AH

When Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) came to Makka from Umra, he saw that the Ka'ba had been damaged due to floods and ordered for renovation work. He enlarged the courtyard area of the Haram Sharif, which meant demolishing some houses, whose owners were duly compensated. He also built a dyke to prevent future flooding.¹⁴

26 AH

Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) extended the courtyard furthermore and again demolished some nearby homes.

64/65AH

Ibn al-Zubayr had to deal with the tyrant Yazid, who, after attacking Karbala and Madina, proceeded to Makka. His army launched fire balls into the Haram and as a result, the Ka'ba was badly damaged. After Yazid's death, Ibn al-Zubayr reconstructed the Ka'ba. As it was virtually destroyed, he ordered the remains to be demolished. Afraid of being cursed, none of the Arabs helped until Ibn al-Zubayr started the process personally. The Black Stone had also been broken into three pieces.

The new Ka'ba was bigger. The length increased from 18 to 26 cubits, and the height from 18 to 27 cubits. It had two doors, level with the ground mosque. According to Azraky, a new door – taken there from Constantinople in 1633 CE – was covered with silver and gilt ornaments, upon which were placed lighted candles, perfuming pans filled with musk, and aloe woods.¹⁵

74 AH

The siege of the city by al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf also damaged the Ka'ba and so he ordered the whole structure to be pulled down and rebuilt. He raised one of the doors and inside, three red marble columns held up the long roof.¹⁶

91 AH

Al-Walid restored the Ka'ba after flood damage.

137 AH

¹³ Cited in *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 125.

¹⁴ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, p. 53.

¹⁵ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 48.

¹⁶ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 56.

Abu Ja'far al-Mansur made a significant contribution to the mosque when he almost doubled the courtyard area.

161-164 AH

Al-Mahdi ordered an extension on the northern side in 161 AH, after which it was apparent that the Ka'ba was no longer in the centre of the mosque. So three years later, he ordered further extensions on the southern side.¹⁷

802 AH

A fierce fire broke out in 802 AH, during the reign of Farj ibn Barqouq which destroyed the western side of the mosque.

979 AH onwards

In 979 AH, the Ottoman king Sultan Salim commissioned a famous Turkish architect to carry out large-scale renovation of the entire mosque. 500 Ottoman-style domes replaced the flat roof, which were later decorated with Arabic calligraphy. By 994 AH, the courtyard area was 164 metres by 168 metres.

1375 AH/1955 CE

King Abd al-Aziz commissioned a modernization of the entire area. In four phases over twenty years, the entire area was renovated – Safa and Marwa was given a roof, the mosque was given an octagon shape, stairways to the Zamzam was built and marble was laid down in the Mataf area. Importantly, King Faisal decided to retain the Ottoman features that had been there for four hundred years. However, other old relics were not preserved. For example, there used to be areas reserved for the four schools of thought to hold their own prayers; this was demolished.¹⁸

The Door of the Ka'ba

The present door is now about two metres above the ground, decorated in gold and silver. It is opened annually (the first of Sha'ban, after Fajr) to wash the interior. The inside is washed with Zamzam water, usually by Saudi royalty.

Symbolically and spiritually, the doors are so sacred in our religion. It is the entrance to Allah's *Rahma*. That is why the area is always rimmed with devout pilgrims begging for forgiveness and His pleasure.

The Key to the Ka'ba

Before leaving Makka (at the time of Migration), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked the key holder, Uthman ibn Talha, permission to enter the Ka'ba. When he rudely refused, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) politely said to him:

¹⁷ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 60.

¹⁸ *The Sacred Lands*, p. 35.

'O Uthman! Remember a day will soon come when you will witness the key in my hand and I will give it to whom I please.'

On the occasion of the Conquest of Makka, Uthman handed the key to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), upon which he said: 'O Uthman! Do you remember the time when you refused me the key and I told you that it would be in my hand one day?' Uthman replied: 'O Messenger of Allah! Indeed you said exactly that. I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to him: 'Not only am I giving this key to you, but it will remain in possession of your future generations until the Day of Judgement. Whoever takes the key away from you will be most unjust.'

Today, the key still remains in the possession of Uthman's descendants.

The inside of the Ka'ba

It is permitted to perform Salah inside the Ka'ba, whether it is Fard or Nafl. On the occasion of Fath Makka (the conquest of Makka in the eighth year of Hijra), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went inside and performed two Rak'at Nafl prayers.

The Hanafi jurists state that when a person is inside the Ka'ba, he can read in any direction he wants. The same applies on the roof of the Ka'ba. If a congregational prayer takes place, and some Muslims have their backs to the Imam, it is ok. What is not permissible is to have one person facing the Imam.

The Mizab

To the west of the Ka'ba, 61 centimetres from the top, there is the Mizab, a water spout that collects the water that falls on the roof of the Ka'ba. Quraysh were the first to add this feature to the Ka'ba.

Over the years it has been replaced and updated. Sultan Abdul Majid Khan made a new one in 1273 AH and it was again replaced by King Fahd more recently. The entire plate is gold-plated.

For some, the Mizab performs a valuable function in that it keeps the roof of the Ka'ba free of water. For the devotees, it is much more important. It is the means by which we can grasp perhaps the most precious water on earth, water that has flowed on the Ka'ba. The water is pure *baraka*. Water is water, but when it touches the Ka'ba it becomes blessed beyond measure.

The Black Stone

The Black Stone is embedded in the south east corner of the Ka'ba, and marks where the Tawaf starts and ends. It is a heavenly stone. It is an irregular oval about 17 centimetres in diameter. At one time, it was broken into three pieces and a number of fragments, now held together by a silver band.¹⁹ When it first

¹⁹ *The Beauty of Makkah and Madinah*, M. Amin, pp. 76.

came down, it was whiter than milk, but then the sins of the children of Adam blackened it. In other report of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), it was specifically the sins of the idol-worshippers that led to this change.²⁰ We are informed that on the Day of Judgement, the Stone will testify in favour of all those who touched or kissed it with sincerity.²¹

The Black Stone has not always been attached to the Ka'ba. In the year 319 AH it was removed by a Shia sect and taken to a place called Ihsa. It stayed there for twenty years until it was returned.²²

Today, it is eight pieces of varying sizes, with the largest being the size of a date. The pieces are affixed to a large stone and encased in a silver frame.

Symbolically speaking, the Black Stone teaches us something very important about the Sunna. We simply follow what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did. He kissed it and so do we. We do not apply our own rationality and thought in worship. After all, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent to stop people revering stones. Abis ibn Rabi'a reports that Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) came near the Black Stone and kissed it and said, 'No doubt, I know that you are a stone and neither can benefit or harm anyone. Had I not seen Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) kissing you, I would not have kissed you.'²³

The Kiswa (Cover of the Ka'ba)

In pre-Islamic period, the Ka'ba had two different coverings, one for summer and one for winter. In Islam this tradition has continued.

In the past, the cloth was furnished by the Sultan of Baghdad or came from Egypt or Yemen. In the past, the material was silk and cotton, embroidered with beautiful calligraphy.

In 1923, King Abdul Aziz stopped the Kiswa from being manufactured outside the Kingdom.²⁴ Today, a special factory near Makka with highly-skilled labourers are responsible for the Kiswa. From about the 25th of Zhul Qa'da to the 10th of Zhul Hajj, the Kiswa is lifted, before the annual changing.

The care and cost of the Kiswa today is staggering. It costs about 17million Saudi Riyals to make the Kiswa each year. In all it is 658 squared metres and is made of 670kg of silk. The embroidery contains 15kg of gold thread. Old covers are cut up and distributed to the Muslim world, to mainly royalties and dignitaries.

²⁰ *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 118.

²¹ *Ancient Prophets of Arabia*, M. Badawi, p. 119.

²² *The History of Makkah Mukarramah*, Dr. M. Ilyas Abdul Ghani, p. 61.

²³ *Al-Muntakhabat al-Imdadiyya*, M.I.H. Pirzada, p. 141.

²⁴ *The Sacred Lands*, p. 40.

Maqam Ibrahim

During the construction of the Ka'ba by Ibrahim and Isma'il (peace be upon them), the walls reached such a height that Ibrahim was unable to complete the top layers and needed something to stand on. Isma'il picked up a stone on which his father stood, leaving an imprint on it. Today, this is enclosed in a gold glass dome just a few yards from the Ka'ba. After performing Tawaf of the Ka'ba, pilgrims are required to perform two Rak'ats there.

Zamzam well

Zamzam water is the best water on earth, spiritually and medically. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Zamzam water is for whatever illness one wants to be cured from.'

In the past, the well was covered with a small square building and the water would be extracted using buckets. Then, the taps were located downstairs in the Mataf area during the 1955 extensions. In a vast area full of taps, Muslim men and women could drink abundantly there, as well as see the original Zamzam well. Today, this is sealed off, to give maximum space for those performing Tawaf.

Certainly Zamzam is a miracle of Allah, in a country where there is no river, lake, reservoir or stream. A small well measuring 18 feet by 14 feet has served millions of eager pilgrims. 8000 litres a second of pumped from this well but the water level has not decreased.

Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked for a bucket of Zamzam to be extracted. He drank from it, washed his blessed saliva in it and instructed the remains to be poured back into the well. When we drink Zamzam, we are drinking left-over water from the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Mawlid al-Nabi (peace be upon him)

This is the place where the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was born. It is located near Mount Marwah on the site of the Sacred Mosque. The Abbasid Caliph Haroon al-Rashid had a mosque built on the site, which Shaykh Abbas Qataan demolished in 1950. He replaced it with an Islamic library. Owing to the latest developments and extensions, this sacred place is certainly under threat.

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