

Pre Islamic Arabia

Significance Of Makkah / Ka'bah to the Arabs before Islam.

1. **Above all**, since the time of prophet Adam (as) the Ka'bah existed and attracted pilgrims from all over Arabia.¹ It was a place of worship and business. There were idols like Laat, 'Uzza, Manaat² and others in the sanctuary but that sanctuary of Allah was known as the biggest in the region with 360 idols in and around the Ka'bah.³ Makkah was important for the Arabs as many prophets of the existing religions once in their lives went through Makkah to spread Islam. It is also said that there are approximately 70, 77, 90, 99 or 300 prophets who are buried in the sanctuary of the Ka'bah between the Yemeni corner and the black stone and around the Ka'bah.⁴ It is said that the prophet Ismail (as) and his mother Hajrah (r) were buried in the Hateem.⁵
2. **Next**, it was important as it was controlled by different tribes, but now by Quraish and more precisely by the Prophet's tribe. That was a prestigious instance to hold and have the key of the Ka'bah. Makkah was important and popular due to the history behind the water Zamzam (the history of prophet Isma'il (as) and his mother Hajrah (r) who collected the water and made a basin to preserve it)⁶. After all water in the desert was vital and the settlement was based around the water source called Zamzam. There is also the Hijr Ismail where prophet Ismail is buried (in the Hateem). We have also the Maqaam Ibrahim and the sa'i, that is the move from mount Safa to mount Marwa.
3. **Added to the above**, Makkah was important as a trading city. As agriculture was impossible, hence everyone involved in commerce through different markets for the poor, better off and the rich. Important markets are at Ukaz or Ukaiz market.⁷ It was situated on crossroads of trade routes, from Yemen to Syria, and Abyssinia to Iraq. Many traders carrying incense (frankincense) from India,⁸ spices, ivory etc. Makkah also became traders themselves, travelling far and wide. They would engage in inland and abroad businesses like to Syria.⁹ The Arabs would also deal with India, China, Africa among others.
4. **Furthermore**, Makkah was important as the leading Makkani were shrewd financiers. That made Makkah the leading financial centre. They were the richest people in the area and could buy any service. Makkah had rich idol worshippers and Hanif.¹⁰ The Ka'bah within Makkah was the symbol of glory and status. The one being its custodian and the ones living in its vicinity was praised and honoured.

¹ Qur'an 3: 96

² Qur'an 53: 19, 20

³ Swahih Al Bukhariy 4287

⁴ Akhbar Makkahh (Azraqi) 1/121 -No 83, Imaam Qurtubi in Tafseer Al-Qurtubi, Vol 2 pg 401, Imaam Tabarani (310 Hijri) in Tafseer-ut-Tabari Vol 1 pg 476, Ibn Asakir (571 Hijri) in Tareekh Dimashq Vol 74 pg 90, Imaam Jalaluddin in Tafseer Ad-Durr Al-Manthoor Vol 1 pg 702, Akhbar Makkahh (Azraqi) 1/129 -No 102, Imam `Abdur Razzaq (211 Hijri) in Musannaf `Abdur Razzaq 5/119 -No 9128, Musannaf `Abdur-Razzaq 5/120 -No 9129, Musannaf `Abdur-Razzaq 5/120 – No 9130, Al-Athar (Muhammad ibn Al-Hassan) 2/292 – No 266, Imam Ibn Jawzi (597 Hijri) in Mutheer-ul-Gharam Vol 2 pg 216, Hafiz Ibn Katheer (774 Hijri) in Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah Vol 1 pg 185

⁵ Imam Ibn Ishaq (151 Hijri) in Seerah Ibn Ishaq Vol 1 pg 153, Imam Ibn Hisham (183 Hijri) in Seerah Ibn Hisham Vol 1 pg 42, Imam Ibn Sa'ad (230 Hijri) in Tabaqat Ibn Sa'ad pg 35, Ibn Qutaybah (276 Hijri) in Al-Ma'arif pg 34, Imam At-Tabari, (310 Hijri) in Tareekh At-Tabari Vol 1 pg 314, Imam Ibn Jawzi (597 Hijri) Al-Muntazam Vol 1 pg 305, Hafiz Dhahabi (748 Hijri) in Tareekh-ul-Islam (Dhahabi) Vol 2 pg 20, Hafiz Ibn Katheer (774 Hijri) in Al-Bidayah wa 'n-Nihayah Vol 1 pg 276

⁶ Swahih Al Bukhariy 3364

⁷ Swahih Al Bukhariy 1770

⁸ Swahih Al Bukhariy 5715

⁹ Swahih Al Bukhariy 6260

¹⁰ Swahih Al Bukhariy 3827

The symbolic and spiritual benefits were important. The sanctity of Ka'bah and pilgrimage to Makkah was essential to survival of Quraish.

5. **Besides**, Makkah was a peaceful and secured area as the Quraish were not interested in constant tribal warfare. They remained neutral in conflicts. They thus developed 'haram' with 20 mile radius of Ka'bah where violence was forbidden. There were pacts made with tribes not to attack caravans during season of trade fairs. Makkah was situated in an isolated area. The isolation of Makkah gave the Arabs control of their own activities where there was no outside power was interested in them. As such the Quraysh ruled the country.