

# The Black Stone

## *Contents*

Images of the Stone

The History of the Stone, the Hajj and the Deities

Hajj and Ka'aba Links

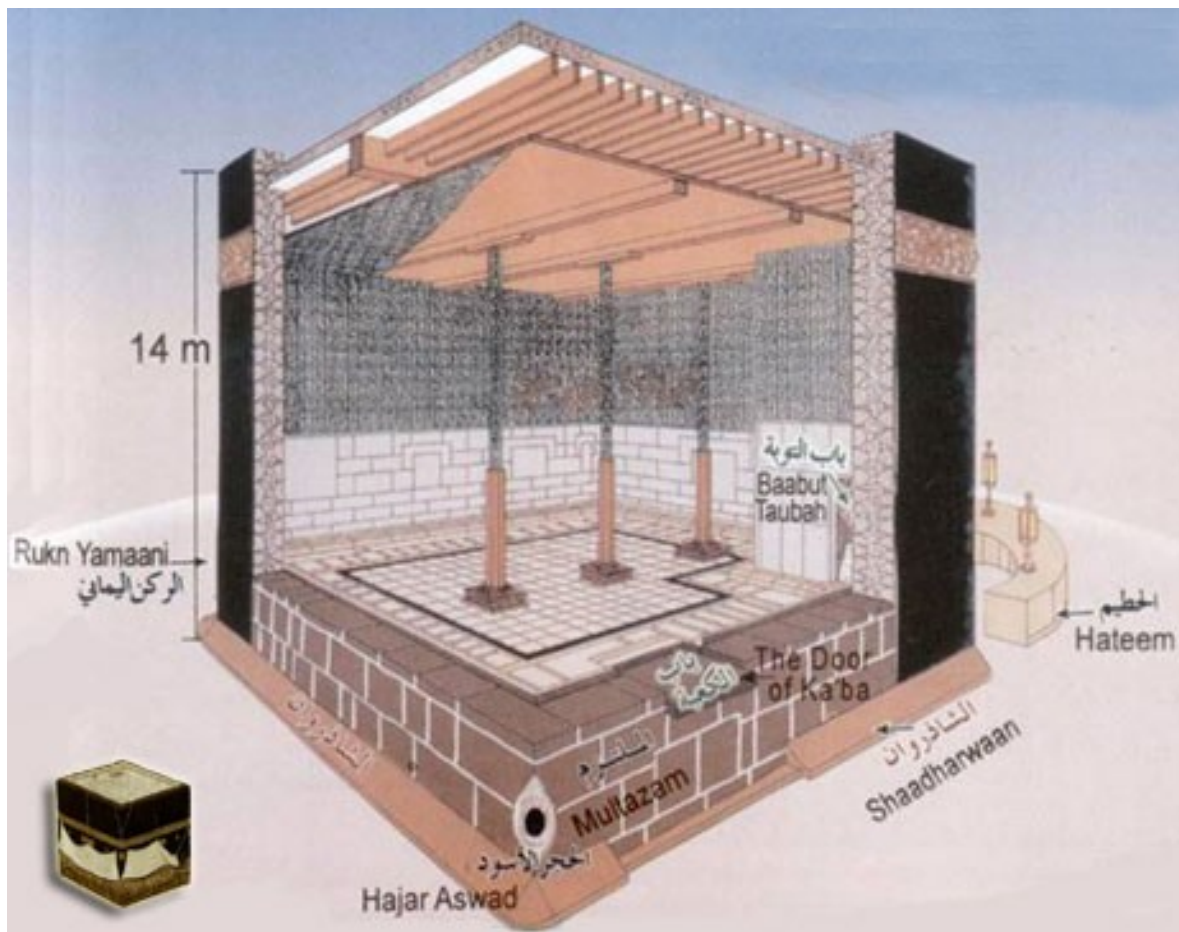
Nawal el Sadaawi's Trial over the Hajj

Images of the Ka'aba

## *Images of the Stone*



Chador-clad women in black touching the black stone. In 930, the stone was removed and shattered by an Iraqi sect of Qarmatians, but the pieces were later returned. The pieces, sealed in pitch and held in place by silver wire. Several authors have likened it to female genitalia (Tate, Karen 2006 Sacred Places of Goddess p 165, Camphausen, Rufus 1996 The Yoni, Sacred Symbol of Female



Cross section of the Ka'aba (Wikipedia)

## *The History of the Stone, the Hajj and the Deities*

According to Islamic belief, God ordained a place of worship on Earth to reflect a house in heaven. Muslims believe that Adam, the first man, was the first to build such a place of worship. According to the Qur'an, the Ka'aba that stands today was built by the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail (Ishmael). It's said that when Abraham and Ishmael were building the Ka'aba, the stone was delivered to them by an angel from heaven. That story would suggest that the Black Stone is a meteorite.

Ochiogrosso<sup>1</sup> echoing the description in al-Kalbi's "The Book of Idols"<sup>2</sup> comments:

"Before Muhammad, the Ka'aba was surrounded by 360 idols, and

every Arab house had its god. Arabs also believed in djinn (subtle beings), with many offspring. Among the major deities of the pre-Islamic era were al-Lat ("the goddess"), worshiped in the shape of a square stone; al-Uzzah ("the mighty"), a goddess identified with the morning star and worshiped as a thigh-bone-shaped slab of granite between al Taif and Mecca; Manat, the goddess of destiny, worshiped as a black stone on the road between Mecca and Medina; and the moon god, Hubal, whose worship was connected with the Black Stone of the Ka'aba'. The stones were said to have fallen from the sun, moon, stars, and planets and to represent cosmic forces. The so-called Black Stone (actually the color of burnt umber) that Muslims revere today is the same one that their forebears had worshiped well before Muhammad and that they believed had come from the moon."

All forms of violence were forbidden in Mecca for four months during the hajj. The Ka'aba was holy ground and a measure of the holiness was its religious tolerance. All the faithful could assemble to honour a time-immemorial tradition. Worshippers of al-Llah, al-Lat, al-Uzza, Manat, Hubal and even the Christian Arabs, could all come together there. The basis of the worship was astral, the 360 idols relating to a year and involving the Moon, Sun, Venus and the Zodiac, as evidenced in Nabatean and Sabian archeology, in the star and crescent symbol of Islam, and the many references in the Qur'an to Muhammad swearing by the Sun, Moon and Stars.

When Muhammad entered Mecca in victory and smashed the idols, it is said retaining a picture of Jesus and Mary, the black stone, which he had kissed on his previous pilgrimage on the lesser Hajj during the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, remained.

Robert Briffault<sup>3</sup> comments:

"When he abolished the idols, of the old religion, Muhammad, whose dominating ideal was to unite all Arabian tribes into a single political body bound by a common cult, felt it to be undesirable or impracticable to do away with the most sacrosanct object or symbol of the old religion"

Briffault claims that the stone is a baetyl of the Goddess:

"Al-Kindy says that Al-Uzza was the moon, her chief shrine being the Ka'aba at Mecca, where she was worshipped in the form of a sacred stone, ... the very stone which the pilgrims to this day visit Mecca to kiss. In doing so the pilgrims recite Caliph Omar's warning declaration: 'I know well that you are a stone that can neither do good nor evil, and unless I had seen the prophet, on whom be prayer and the blessings of god kiss you, I would not kiss you'."

Karen Armstrong<sup>4</sup> rather says their shrines, such as those at Taif were beloved of the people of Mecca:

"Al-Lat had a shrine at Taif, which was in a cooler and more fertile part of the Hijaz, and al-Uzza had one Naklah to the south east of Mecca and that Manat, the fateful one had her shrine at Qudayd on the Red Sea coast".

"When the Arabs venerated these stones they were not worshipping them in any crude simplistic way but were seeing in them a focus of divinity. ... The Arabs may not have worshipped al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat in a personalized way, but we shall see that they felt very passionate about them. ... Their cultus was confined to their shrines ..., but they were an essential part of the spiritual landscape of the Bedouin of the Hijaz, who saw Naklah, Taif and Qudad as holy places and sanctuaries where Arabs could find their centre. The antiquity of the Goddesses was another reason for their cult. When they worshipped them in their shrines, the Arabs felt in touch with their forefathers, who had venerated the banat-al-Llah there, and this provided a healing sense of continuity."

She also notes that the Hajj was an ancient rite which had long preceded Islam.

"The hajj was originally an Autumn rite apparently persecuting the dying sun to bring on the winter rains. Pilgrims would rush in a body to the hollow of Muzdalifa, the abode of the Thunder God, make an all-night vigil on the plain by Mt. Arafat, hurl pebbles at the three sacred pillars of Mina and offer an animal sacrifice"<sup>5</sup>.

Hurling the pebbles at the pillar of the Shaitan is still one of the most dangerous phases of the hajj. In 2004 at the time of writing, 244 people died in a stampede. A tradition of sexual freedom on the hajj predates Islam in more ancient fertility rites.

The Hajj's retention was in fact a compromise with the people of Mecca, that Mecca would retain the ancient hajira pilgrimage, a centre of its energy, but would embrace Islam.

Briffault<sup>6</sup> notes:

"When Muhammad overthrew the old religion of Arabia, he was not strong enough to defy and offend the immemorial sentiment of the Arab people. The divine mission of the prophet was reconciled with the old religion by Islam receiving the sanction of the immemorial deity".

Briffault<sup>7</sup> states:

"At the immemorial shrine of al-Uzza at Mecca, it is a practice for women to offer themselves to the holy pilgrims. With Shi'ites it is the custom to form temporary unions during the period of the holy pilgrimage. It is stipulated at a fixed date all relations must cease, and the parties of such unions do not give signs of recognition if they subsequently meet. Any children of such unions are regarded as a blessing in the family and are looked upon as divine children or saints."

Nabatean inscriptions in Sinai and other places display widespread references to names including Allah, El (god) and Allat (goddess), with regional references to al-Uzza, Ba'al and Manat<sup>8</sup>. Allat is also found in Sinai in South Arabian language. Allah occurs particularly as Garm- 'allahi - 'god decided' and Aush-allahi - 'gods covenant'. We find both Shalm-lahi 'Allah is peace' and Shalm-allat, 'the peace of the goddess'.

"The guardians of the Ka'aba are still called the Beni Shaybah, or sons of the old woman. Popular tradition relates how Abraham, when he founded the Ka'aba brought the ground from an old woman



to which it belonged. She however consented to part with it only on the condition that she and her descendents should have the key of the place in their keeping"<sup>9</sup>. It is also related that they are descendents of the Queen of Sheba or Sa'aba. Saba relating to the Sabbath, the number seven, and the seven circumambulations of the Ka'aba.

The Hajira or 'sudden departure', although applied to Muhammad's sudden exit, bears the name of Hajira (Hagar), who discovered the spring of Zam Zam flowing by Ishmael's foot searching for water for him after the 'sudden departure' of Ibrahim<sup>10</sup>, again a symbol of the sacred feminine.

### *Nawal el Sadaawi's Trial over the Hajj*

Nawal El Saadawi is the first woman in Egyptian history to be threatened with a forced divorce for expressing her views. She was accused of apostasy - renouncing one's religion - for allegedly insulting Islam<sup>11</sup>.

Nawal's outspokenness has caused her many problems. As the first Arab woman to speak out against female circumcision 30 years ago Nawal was sacked from her ministerial job of Director of Public Health.

In 1981 after criticising Sadat's regime she was imprisoned. Nawal's name appeared on a fundamentalist death list and both she and her husband Sherif were forced into exile.

During the course of an interview, Nawal had referred to the historically accepted fact that elements of the Hajj, such as kissing the black stone had pre-Islamic, pagan roots.

The journalist couldn't believe his ears. All he heard was Nawal calling the Hajj pagan. "You're opening fire," he said to Nawal. "Yes" she replied, "but people should know".

Ra'fat returned to his editor, Mohamed Hassan Alafy, who saw immediately that the story would run and run. He led the front page that week with "Dr Nawal El Saadawi says Hajj is a remnant of

paganism."

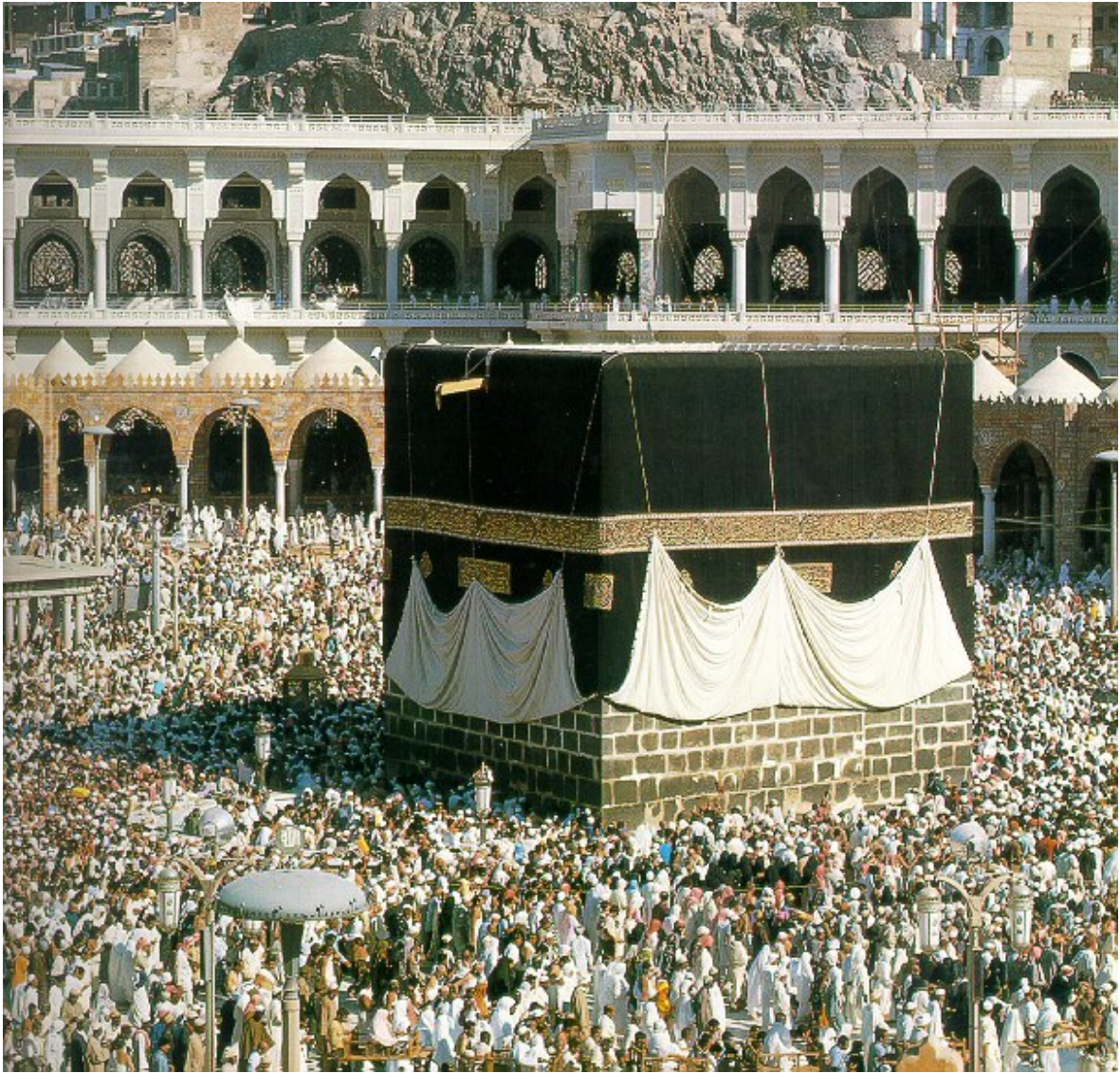
Readers of the newspaper were led to excerpts of Nawal's interview with the line: "She has exploded bombs by her inflammatory opinions." "We want her to be beheaded". Reader's letter to Al Maydan.

Next, the paper upped the stakes by taking the interview to the Grand Mufti, eager to get a fatwa. Now anyone who wanted to be seen as defender of the faith had legitimacy from the highest Islamic authority in the land. The Mufti had been clear - if Nawal had said what the paper claimed she had said, there was no doubt, she had rejected Islam.

One man, a lawyer named Nabih el Wahsh, decided to seize the moment, knowing that the situation was ripe for a public battle between the conservative interpretation of Islam and the more liberal attitudes towards freedom of speech. What was it that had infuriated him so much? "Firstly, her denial of the Hajj, which is one pillar of Islam. She categorically said that Hajj and the kissing of the black stone are remnants of paganism. She also denied a verse in the Koran which says that men are entitled to twice the inheritance of women. Who is she to demand equality? Is she greater than God?"

Finally, after some prevarication, the court declared on 30th July 2001 that there was no case to answer. She will not go to prison and she and Sherif will not be forcibly divorced.

## *Images of the Ka'aba*



The Kaaba





The Mosque at Mecca



The Kaaba and al-Masjid al-Haram

The Spring of Zam-Zam

## Footnotes

1. Occhiogrosso, Peter 1996 The Joy of Sects, Doubleday, NY.
2. Faris, Nabih 1952 (trans) al-Kalbi "The Book of Idols" pp 12-29
3. Briffault, Robert 1927 "The Mothers" George Allen Unwin, London.' v3 79
4. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 64
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6. Briffault, Robert 1927 "The Mothers" George Allen Unwin, London.' v3 78
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8. Negev, Abraham 1986 Nabatean Archeology Today NY Univ. Pr. NY.
9. Briffault, Robert 1927 "The Mothers" George Allen Unwin, London.' v3 80
10. Shad, Abdul 1986 From Adam to Muhammad, Noor Publishing, Delhi. p 48
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