

Post cards of Mecca then and now

London - Mohammad Mekabbaty

I collect post cards and have hundreds from Muslim countries. Last month a friend sent me a postcard of Mecca, the Holy City of Muslim pilgrimage (hajj). It matters little to Muslims how far from Mecca they live as their aim in life is to visit the Holy City at any cost. If they die in the process they are very happy as it guarantees absolution from all sins, just as if they had completed the pilgrimage.

I searched through my collection for postcards of hajj, the annual pilgrimage which brings together more than three million souls in one place, all wearing the same clothes with no regard for class, colour, origin, nationality, language or age. One card shows the sunset on the day of Arafat. Other cards show the Hajjis when they arrive in Mecca. Others had pictures of tawaf (encircling the Kaaba) seven times and kissing the black stone. Some of my postcards go back to 1900. Although Mecca, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia, is only 85 kilometers from Jeddah, the journey on camels, donkeys and horses meant two-days of desert travel. The Egyptians crossed the Suez Canal with their camels carrying the holy

carpet; the Syrians started their camel journey four days after Ramadan. Now it takes only 45 minutes in air-conditioned busses and cars! It is impossible to compare security, facilities and hygiene standards: chilled water can now be obtained throughout the journey and sixty tunnels through the mountains facilitate travel. In Mecca, five star hotels, from internationally renowned chains, provide over 50,000 rooms. All the tents in Mennah and Arafat are fire proofed and air conditioned. The facilities include showers and toilets for three million pilgrims. The journey to Mecca must be completed by visiting Medina and the mosque where Prophet Mohammed was buried. These two holy cities of Islam and Jerusalem are the

jewels in the crown of Islamic sites. Visitors perform umrah throughout the year, bask in the peace of the soul and ask for forgiveness for their sins. The Ministry of Haj and various other institutions are responsible for the welfare of religious tourists and take care of their accommodation, road, air, and sea transport, telecommunications, food, water, medical and hospital needs and other requirements. As I looked at the post cards I felt I was there, in the Holy Land, performing Haj. I hope every Moslem has the opportunity to make this journey and enjoy the great blessings of this magnificent spiritual voyage. I have visited all the world's major cities and capitals and none compares with Mecca. ■



Mecca

مكة المكرمة



The Egyptian caravan

المحمل المصري

Retour du Éapis Saere de la Meccue



The Syrian caravan

المحمل الشامي