



Desert of Pharan: Unofficial Histories Behind the Mass Expansion of Mecca

Ahmed Mater

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Through a series of photographs, Ahmed Mater charts the city's origins to its more recent history over the last 5 years. It is a study of the site's recent transformation ? Mecca, until recently, embodied a unique urban tapestry, layered with histories that are stitched together by an abundance of organically rooted communities and cultures. It is a place that accommodated not only sacred structures and sites but also huge fluctuations in population during Ramadan (up to 3 million visitors a year travel to Mecca for Eid and Hajj). More recently, these sites and communities have been eradicated and are being replaced with five-star-studded high rise developments, transforming it from an active metropolis to the world's most exclusive, yet most visited religious tourist destination, reflective of an unprecedented experimentation with architecture and its possible impact on social stratification. This photographic essay is a celebration of Mecca's real and projected or imaginary states. It provides singular access to this site and its associated social and religious rituals, along with its architectural urban planned and proposed development.

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