

Jiblah

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The city of Jiblah was founded at the end of the eleventh century, and reached the apex of its political and cultural development as the capital of the Sulaihid state during the rule of Queen Arwa, in the early twelfth century A.D. Founded on the spot where a Jew named Dhu Jiblah made pottery, the place was known as Dhu Jiblah throughout the medieval period. The original city was built by Abd Allah, son of Muhammad, brother of Ali ibn-Saba who founded the Sulaihid state. After Ali died he was succeeded by his son al-Mukarram, the husband of Arwa. For reasons which remain obscure, it is clear that it was Arwa and not al-Mukarram who governed the Sulaihid kingdom. It was Arwa who decided to move the royal residence from Sana'a to Dhu Jiblah and to construct the capital there.

As the Sulaihid capital, Dhu Jiblah flourished and became a centre of Islamic studies, with special emphasis on Ismaili philosophy. The Sulaihid state maintained close relations with the Fatimid Imam in Egypt, and profited from the commerce in the Red Sea through its control of the port in Aden. The Sulaihids ruled most of what is currently North and South Yemen combined.

The reign of Arwa is famous as a time of great prosperity and cultural florescence. The Queen supported industry and commerce, and improved the road network

all over the country. Many mosques and palaces were built in Jiblah under Arwa's reign, and some of these are still extant. The Great Mosque, for example, was built by Arwa in 1088, on the site of the original royal palace. The mosque remains to this day in excellent condition, and contains the tomb of the beloved Queen. The Dar al-Sultanah, remains of which exist today, is reported to have been her royal residence.

The city stands between two mountain streams which run with water all year long: Sa'ilat al-Halid to the north, and Sa'ilat al-Ta'bar, which runs from the fortress of al-Ta'kar and intersects Sa'ilat al-Hadid just south of the city.

The population of modern Jiblah is around 20,000. The city has thirty-seven mosques, five of which are exclusively for women. Several girls' schools and a religious institute for girls maintain the tradition of education for both sexes in the city which produced the only Queen known in Yemen during the Islamic period.

Jiblah is the administrative centre of a district (*nahiya*) which includes twelve *uzlahs*, containing 350 villages, with a total population of nearly 100,000. The whole district is in desperate need of financial assistance to complete the development projects which will provide the infra-structure for water supply systems, roads, schools and health clinics needed by the population. The major concern of the citizens in Jiblah today is to improve their water supply. The construction of two new cisterns would relieve the situation, one to the west and one to the north of the city.

The citizens of Jiblah today display the same predilection for commerce and industry as they did in Arwa's time. Hopefully it will not be long before the fruits of their endeavours will be adequate to finance the development of the district and the restoration of the city's monuments.