

QOM

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Located in north-central Iran just 156 kilometers (97 miles) south-west of the capital city of Tehran, Qom is the seventh largest city in the country and the capital of Qom province. The town lies on both banks of the Qom river (Rud-e Qom) and beside the salt desert, Dasht-e Kavir. Since most of the land in the province is uncultivable (given the scanty rainfall and proximity to the desert), Qom excels in manufacturing (rugs and other textiles, glass, pottery, cement, and shoes), rather than in agriculture. Qom is best known, however, as the largest center for Shi'a scholarship in the world, containing over fifty theological seminaries (*hawzas*). Ayatollah Khomeini launched the Iranian Revolution from Qom, where he studied for many years, and where the first protest demonstrations against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi began (January 1978). Qom is considered to be the second most sacred city in Iran after Mashhad. It contains the shrine to Fatimah Zahra (Fatima the Pure), whom Shi'as consider to be Mohammad's only daughter and a paragon of female virtue. Since she was the only child of Mohammad who had surviving children - he had no adult sons - modern descendants of Mohammad trace their lineage exclusively through Fatimah and her only husband Ali ibn Abi Talib (the first Shi'ah Imam and the fourth Sunni Caliph). Fatimah reportedly died in 816 C.E.

while visiting the city. Qom became a place of pilgrimage in the seventeenth century, when the Safavid rulers built a golden-domed shrine over her grave. Other landmarks of Qom include Kahak and Vashnaveh Caves, Howz-e Soltan and Namak Salt Lakes, Astaneh Moqaddaseh Museum, A'zam Mosque, and Mar'ashi Najafi Library.

Bibliography

Cole, Juan Ricardo. *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam*. London, I.B. Tauris, 2002.