

**Description of
the Holy Land
and its names**

By

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Description of the Holy Land and its names

This chapter is divided into two sections:

Section I: Description of the Holy Land.

Section II: Names of the Holy Land.



Section I: Description of the Holy Land

Description:

The Holy Land is Mecca the Honoured⁽¹⁾ or the Meccan Sanctuary. The expression “the Sanctuary” (al-Ḥaram) stands for the Sanctuary of Mecca which is the Sanctuary of Allah and the Sanctuary of His Prophet (s). *Al-Ḥaram* is similar to *al-Ḥarām*. The Sanctuary of Mecca is also designated as *al-muḥarram* (the Sacred, the Holy, or the Inviolable).⁽²⁾

The Holy Land may be designated as the Sacred Mosque; Ibn al-Qayyim (m) said: The Sacred Mosque stands for three things in the Book of Allah Most High: the House itself (the Ka’ba), the Mosque surrounding it and the whole Sanctuary.⁽³⁾



The boundaries of the Sanctuary:

The first to define the boundaries of the Ḥaram was Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (p), the friend of Allah, following the indications of Jibrīl (p). Ibrāhīm (p) put stone markers for them.⁽⁴⁾ The Prophet (s) renewed them the Year of the Conquest of Mecca. Ibn ‘Abbās (r2) narrated: **The Year of the Victory, the Messenger of Allah (s) sent Tamīm Ibn Asad al-Khuzāī to renew the boundaries of the Ḥaram.**⁽⁵⁾

Therefore, the boundaries of the Ḥaram are inspired by revelation and there is no place for reason or interpretation. These markers came to define properly what is inside the Ḥaram and what is not.



The princes and governors continued to renew the markers from all sides as needed until the number of flags surrounding the Ḥaram reached almost a thousand. The outline of the Meccan Ḥaram is 127 km and it covers an area of 550.300 square kilometres.⁽⁶⁾

The boundaries of the Ḥaram today:

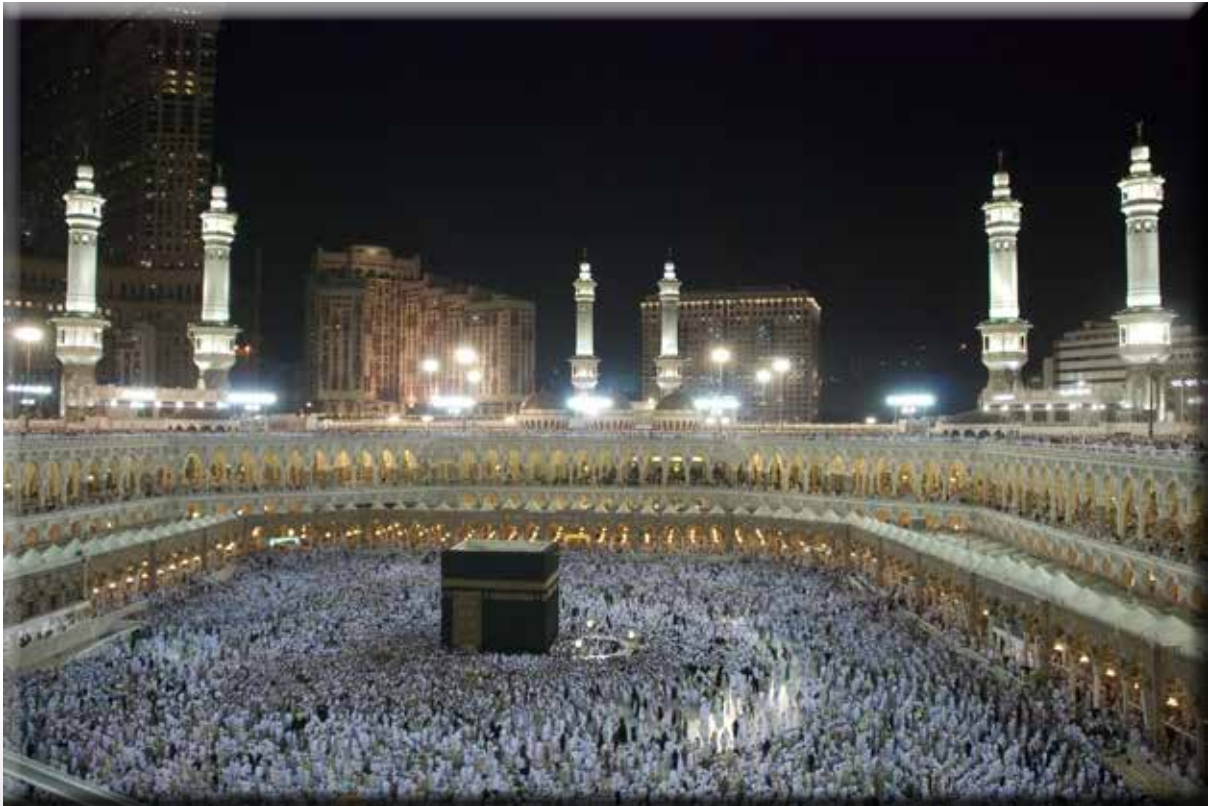
Ancient boundaries of the Ḥaram were mentioned by historians and scholars over the passing centuries⁽⁷⁾, underlining their unfailing care and attention for this honoured place. Nowadays clear markers have been set up to indicate the limits of the Ḥaram without any possibility of confusion or error considering the rules of jurisprudence linked to the entering of this holy place; the most important ones are located⁽⁸⁾:

1. On the road to **Medina**; at-Tanīm: 6.5 km.
2. On the highway to **Jeddah**: 22 km.
3. On the new road to **al-Līth**: 17 km.
4. On the road to **Ṭā'if as-Sayl**: 12.850 km.
5. On the road to **Ṭā'if al-Hadā**: 15.5 km.



Section II: Names of the Holy

The Holy Land has plenty of famous names quoted in the Book, the Sunna and the Arabic language. Since ancient times the ulama took great care of them, which underlines its eminence and value. Some scholars gathered up to fifty names for the Holy Land; this particular attention reflects the honour of the Ḥaram. An-Nawawī (m) said: Know that the



abundance of names is a sign of greatness, as Allah Most High has many names and His Messenger (s) also. We know no country with more names than Mecca and Medina, for they are the best places on Earth.⁽⁹⁾ Amongst the names of the Holy Land are the following:



First: Mecca:

The most famous and more common of its names; it is quoted once in the Qur'ān, Allah Most High said:

﴿وَهُوَ الَّذِي كَفَّ أَيْدِيَهُمْ عَنْكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ بِبَطْنِ مَكَّةَ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ أَظْفَرَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ﴾



“And it is He who withheld their hands from you and your hands from them within the valley of Mecca after He caused you to overcome them.” Surat al-Fatḥ (The Victory): 24.

The ulama diverged on the cause of the denomination of Mecca; there are many opinions:

The first one: The city was named Mecca because **it wipes out (*tamukku*) those who perpetrate injustice inside it.** It is said: to break (*makka*) the pride of someone; and also: Mecca wipes out (*tamukku*) all sins.⁽¹⁰⁾

The second one: The name was given because of **the scarcity of water therein.** Ibn Sīda (**m**) said: The child sucks the milk with appetite (*makka* and *makmaka*) at his mother's breast; from this expression came the name Mecca, for its lack of water. People used to extract (*imtakka*) its water as deep as possible.⁽¹¹⁾

The third one: The name was given as **it attracts people from afar**. It is also said: I sucked the marrow (*tamakkaktu*) from the bone.⁽¹²⁾

Secondly: Bakka:

One of its most famous names; it is quoted **once** in the Qur'ān, Allah Most High said:

﴿ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

“Indeed, the first House (of worship) established for mankind was that at Bakka - blessed and a guidance for the worlds.” Surat ‘Āli ‘Imrān (Family of ‘Imrān): 96.



The ulama diverged on the significance of “Bakka”; there are two opinions:

The first one: Mecca and Bakka have one same meaning, they are substitutes and both are names that designate the land, they are similar as the Arabs sometimes replace the “m” by a “b”: for instance *lāzib* and *lāzim* both mean necessary.⁽¹³⁾

The second one: There is a difference between Mecca and Bakka; it is said that Bakka is the spot of the House and Mecca is the whole Sanctuary.⁽¹⁴⁾

The prevailing opinion is that Mecca and Bakka have the one same meaning; this is the view of most linguists.⁽¹⁵⁾

The ulama diverged on the cause of the denomination of Bakka; there are two opinions:

The first one: The name Bakka came from the **congestion of people in it**; the verb *bakka*,



yabukku, *bakkatan* means to congest; **the people congested a place: *tabākka***. The word *al-bakkaka* stands for congestion or crowdedness; *bakbāk* means a lot.⁽¹⁶⁾

Al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (m) said: Mecca was named Bakka as people are pushing (*yabukku*) each other during circumambulation (*ṭawāf*) because of the congestion.⁽¹⁷⁾

Ibn Durayd (m) said: Mecca was named Bakka because of the congestion of people inside it.⁽¹⁸⁾

Ibn Jurayj (m) used to say: It was called Bakka for the congestion (*tabākk*) of people heading for the Ka'ba; the crowd was such that people used to tread on other people's toes.⁽¹⁹⁾

Qatāda (m) said: Mecca was named Bakka as Allah crowded (*bakka*) it with people, so that women pray in front of men, something that does not happen in other countries.⁽²⁰⁾

The second one: The name Bakka was given as **Mecca breaks (*tabukku*) the necks of the powerful**; and therefore it breaks their pride.

Al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad (m) said: It was so named as it used to break (*tabukku*) the necks of the powerful who perpetrated an injustice there⁽²¹⁾; *al-bakk* means to break a neck.⁽²²⁾

Thirdly: The Mother of Cities (Umm al-Qurā):

The name Umm al-Qurā appears twice in the Noble Qur'an; the word of Allah Most High:

﴿وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مَبَارَكٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَى وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا﴾

“And this is a blessed Scripture which We have revealed, confirming that which (was revealed) before it, that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it.” Surat Al-'An'ām (The Cattle): 92. And in the verse:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْآنًا فَرَاءَنَا عَرَبِيًّا لِنُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا﴾

“And thus We have revealed to you an Arabic Qur’ān that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it”. Surat ash-Shūrā (The Consultation): 7.

The ulama diverged on the cause of the denomination “The Mother of Cities”; there are three opinions:

The first one: The name was given as the Earth was spread from beneath it, but this view lacks evidence and it is backed by two weak ḥadīths.⁽²³⁾



The second one: The name was given because the people of all surrounding cities are heading towards it. Az-Zarkashī (m) said: Because the people of all surrounding cities resort to it for their religion and worldly affairs; for the Ḥajj and ‘Umra or for a visit; it is said: devotional rituals are accepted only if performed there.⁽²⁴⁾

The third one: The name was given as it is the greatest of all cities, it bears the House of Allah Most High. Moreover, as tradition says, the king and his capital have pre-eminence; thus it was named *umm* as in Arabic *umm* is the mother and the mother has always priority.⁽²⁵⁾

Ibn al-Qayyim (m) said: Amongst the signs of its preference: Allah Most High informed us that Mecca is the Mother of Cities; all the cities are linked to it, they are its followers, it is their central axis and origin. Therefore, there cannot be any city equivalent to it; it is similar to the Fātiḥa: the Prophet (s) said of it that it was the Mother of the Qur’ān; this is why it is second to none in all the divine books.⁽²⁶⁾

Fourthly: The Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām):



This descriptive expression appears 15 times in the Noble Qur’ān⁽²⁷⁾; sometimes referring to the Holy Land (al-Balad al-Ḥarām). *Ḥarām* has the meaning of *muḥarram*: sacred, inviolable, as Allah Most High made it sacred and exalted it. Sometimes the expression “The Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām)” refers to the Honourable Ka’ba as the names of Mecca mingle metaphorically with the names of the Ka’ba.⁽²⁸⁾

Ibn al-Qayyim (m) said: The Sacred Mosque stands for three things in the Book of Allah Most High: the House itself (the Ka’ba), the Mosque surrounding

it and the whole Sanctuary.⁽²⁹⁾ Amongst the verses where the expression al-Masjid al-Ḥarām (the Sacred Mosque) designates the Holy Land (al-Balad al-Ḥarām):

1. The word of Allah Most High:

﴿لَتَدْخُلَنَّ الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ﴾

2. “You shall indeed enter al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, if Allah wills, in safety.” Surat al-Fath (The Victory): 27.



The word of Allah Most High:

﴿ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن لَّمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلُهُ حَٰضِرِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ﴾

3. “This is for those whose family is not present in the area of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām.” Surat al-Baqara: 196.
4. **The meaning:** Enjoying the Ḥajj and ‘Umra in this case concerns foreigners; it does not suit for people of Mecca.⁽³⁰⁾

Fifthly: The City (al-Balad):

The expression al-Balad (the City) appears **three times** in the Noble Qur’ān; Allah Most High said:

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا﴾

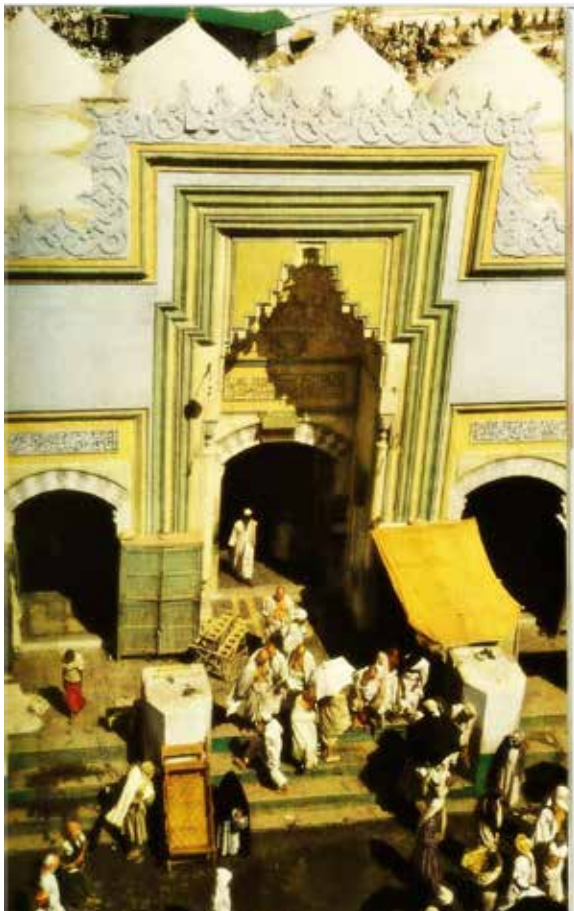
“And when Ibrāhīm said: My Lord, make this City secure” Surat Ibrāhīm: 35.

Allah Most High said:

﴿لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ ﴿١﴾ وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ﴾

“No, I swear by this City. And you are a dweller of this City” Surat al-Balad (The City): 1 – 2.





According to all the commentators (mu-fassirūn) the City is Mecca the Honoured.⁽³¹⁾

Ibn ‘Abbās (r2) narrated: Allah made this city sacred on the day He created the Earth and the heavens; so it is sacred by the sacredness conferred on it by Allah until the Day of Resurrection.⁽³²⁾

The cause of the denomination “The City” (al-Balad): It is the heart (*ṣadr*, literally the chest) of the cities. Ibn al-Jawzī (m) said: *al-balad* (the city): the heart, the centre of cities; *al-balda* is the chest; if someone *ta-ballada* it means that he put his hand on his chest confused and troubled.⁽³³⁾

Ibn Fāris (m) said: It is said: The camel put its chest (*balda*) on the ground when it kneels.⁽³⁴⁾ Az-Zamakhsharī (m) said: The camel put its *balda* – namely its chest – on the ground when it kneels.⁽³⁵⁾

Sixthly: The Secure City (al-Balad al-Amīn):

The expression appears **once** in the Qur’ān; Allah Most High said:

﴿وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ﴾

“By this secure City”; Surat at-Tīn: 3. It means that this City is safe from being attacked or invaded.⁽³⁶⁾ It is said: Its dwellers are in safety, may it be during Pre-Islamic time of ignorance (Jāhiliya) or after the dawn of Islam.⁽³⁷⁾ The commentators unanimously agreed that the Secure City here is Mecca the Honoured⁽³⁸⁾. Moreover, this oath of Allah Most High underlines the grace and eminence of Mecca.

Al-Qazwīnī (m) said: Mecca is the Secure City, honoured and exalted by Allah Most High and characterized by His oath and the supplication of Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (p):



﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا﴾

“And when Ibrāhīm said: My Lord, make this a secure city” Surat al-Baqara: 126.

It is also **described as safe** in the word of Allah Most High:

﴿أَوَلَمْ نُمَكِّنْ لَهُمْ حَرَمًا آمِنًا﴾

“Have We not established for them a safe Sanctuary”; Surat Al-Qaṣaṣ (The Stories): 57.

And the word of Allah Most High:

﴿أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا حَرَمًا آمِنًا﴾

“Have they not seen that We made a safe sanctuary” Surat al-‘Ankabūt (The Spider): 67. **This means** a secure place.⁽³⁹⁾ The security is the most important condition for well-being; the very first thing a dweller asks for is security, safety from hardship and fears; if one is safe in his home, he feels comfortable in his mind and he is able to enjoy the bliss he receives.⁽⁴⁰⁾



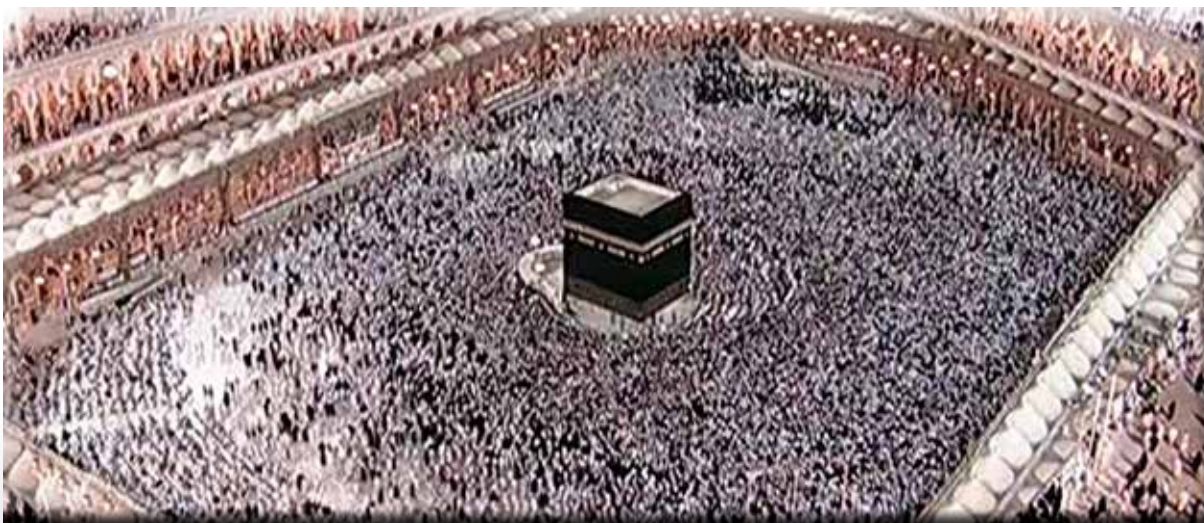
Security is amongst the greatest graces bestowed by Allah Most High to His creatures. Thanks to security civilizations are rising, societies are flourishing and people are blossoming. **It is a blessing of Allah Most High to His prophet Ibrāhīm (p) that he raised his consciousness to the importance of security: He inspired him this great supplication: at first:**

﴿رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا﴾

“My Lord, make this a secure city”; Surat al-Baqara (The Cow): 126. This supplication came before the city was built. Allah made security a pillar, a basis and a condition for the erection of this city and its existence. **At last:**

﴿رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا﴾

“My Lord, make this city secure”; Surat Ibrāhīm: 35. Ibrāhīm (p) asked Allah Most High to perpetuate the grace of security bestowed on this city.



Certainly Allah Most High fulfilled the supplication of Ibrāhīm (p), granting the Holy Land the blessing of security. For the greatness of this grace, Allah exalted be He, reminded its people of it many times in the Noble Qur'ān in order to value it and enjoy it.

Seventhly: al-Balda (the City):

Allah Most High said by the mouth of His noble Messenger (s):

﴿ إِنَّمَا أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ رَبَّ هَذِهِ الْبَلَدَةِ الَّذِي حَرَّمَهَا وَلَهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ ﴾

(Say, O Muḥammad), “I have only been commanded to worship the Lord of this City, Who made it sacred/forbidden and to whom (belongs) all things.” Surat an-Naml (The Ants): 91. Ath-Tha‘labī (m) said: It means: Mecca, Allah made it a secure sanctuary, illicit bloodshed is not shed inside it, no one is unfairly treated there, its game is not to be hunted or disturbed and its vegetation is not to be cut.⁽⁴¹⁾ **This view is the prevailing one.**⁽⁴²⁾



Endnotes

- (1) In the past, the Sanctuary (Ḥaram) encompassed Mecca; today some parts of the city are located outside the Sanctuary because of urban expansion.
- (2) See: Lisān al-‘Arab, (95/4), Tahdhīb al-‘asmā’ wa al-lughāt, (88/3), al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ, p. 1411, Mukhtār as-ṣiḥāḥ, p. 56.
- (3) Aḥkām ahl adh-dhimma, (400/1).
- (4) See: al-Maghāzī, al-Wāqidi (270/2), Muthīr al-‘azm as-sākin ilā ashraf al-‘amākin, Ibn al-Jawzī (187/1), Shifā’ al-gharām bi akhbār al-balad al-ḥarām, al-Fāsī (86/1).
- (5) Reported by Ibn Sa’d in aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā (295/4). Ibn Ḥajar made its chain ḥasan (good) in al-Iṣāba (183/1).
- (6) See: al-Ḥaram al-makkī ash-sharīf wa al-a‘lām al-muḥīṭa bihi dirāsa tārikhiya wa maydaniya, p. 165; Makka al-mukarrama tārikh wa ma‘ālim, p. 34.
- (7) See: Akhbār Makka, al-Azraqī (131/2); Akhbār Makka, al-Fākihī (89/5).
- (8) See: al-Ḥaram al-makkī ash-sharīf wa al-a‘lām al-muḥīṭa bihi dirāsa tārikhiya wa maydaniya, p. 166-167; Makka al-mukarrama tārikh wa ma‘ālim, p. 34; Aḥkām al-Ḥaram al-Makkī ash-shar‘iya, p. 40.
- (9) Tahdhīb al-‘asmā’ wa al-lughāt (332/3).
- (10) See: Jamhara al-lugha, Ibn Durayd (166/1); Gharīb al-ḥadīth, al-Khaṭṭābī (72/3).

- (11) Al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ (52/1). See: Jamhara al-lugha, (984/2); Muʿjam mā istaʿjam (269/1).
- (12) See: az-Zāhir, al-ʿAnbārī (106/2); al-ʿAzmina, p. 43.
- (13) See: al-Kanz al-lughawī, Ibn as-Sakīt, p. 14; Jamhara al-lugha (335/1); az-Zāhir (497/1).
- (14) See: Akhbār Makka, al-Azraqī (280/1); Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (597/5); Muʿjam mā istaʿjam (269/1).
- (15) See: Muʿjam mā istaʿjam (269/1); Lisān al-ʿArab (133/2).
- (16) See: Jamhara al-lugha (176, 74/1); az-Zāhir (106/2); Maqāyys al-lugha, Ibn Fāris (186/1).
- (17) See: al-ʿAyn (285/5).
- (18) Jamhara al-lugha (75/1). See: az-Zāhir (106/2).
- (19) Akhbār Makka, al-Azraqī (280/1). See: Jamhara al-lugha (378/1).
- (20) Al-Manāsik, Ibn Abī ʿArūba, p. 29; Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (9/4); ad-Durr al-manthūr (266/2).
- (21) al-ʿAyn (285/5).
- (22) See: Jamhara al-lugha (176/1); Al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ (345/3).
- (23) **The first ḥadīth:** Ibn Sābiṭ narrated: The Prophet (s) said: **The Earth was spread from Mecca and the Angels were circumambulating the House.** This ḥadīth is mursal (hurried) and reported by aṭ-Ṭabarānī in his tafsīr (199/1); and Ibn Abī Ḥātim in his tafsīr (76/1), H. 316. Ibn Kathīr made its chain weak in his tafsīr (71/1). **The second ḥadīth:** Ibn ʿAbbās (r2) narrated: The Messenger of Allah (s) said: **The first piece of land that was put on Earth was the spot of the House; then Earth was spread from it and the first mountain that**

Allah Most High put on Earth was Abū Qubays, from it were spread the mountains.
Reported by al-‘Uqaylī in aḍ-ḍu‘afā’ (341/2); al-Albānī said it was weak in ḍā‘if al-Jāmi‘ aṣ-ṣaghīr, p. 312, H. 2132.

- (24) I‘lām as-sājid bi-aḥkām al-masājid, p. 79.
- (25) See: Muthīr al-‘azm as-sākin ilā ashraf al-‘amākin, Ibn al-Jawzī (327/1); Al-Qirā li-Qāṣid Umm al-Qurā, Muḥibb ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭabarī, p. 651.
- (26) Zād al-ma‘ād, (49 – 50/1).
- (27) **The expression “the Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām)” is quoted in the following surats:** al-Baqara (The Cow): 144, 149, 150, 191, 196, 217; al-Mā’ida (The Table Spread): 2; al-‘Anfāl (The Spoils of War): 34; at-Tawba (The Repentance): 7, 19, 28; al-‘Isrā’ (The Night Journey): 1; al-Ḥajj (The Pilgrimage): 25; al-Fath (The Victory): 25, 27.
- (28) See: Asmā’ al-Ka‘ba al-musharrafa fī ad-dars al-lughawī, p. 13.
- (29) Aḥkām ahl adh-dhimma, (400/1).
- (30) See: Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (255/2); Tafsīr al-Baghawī (488/4).
- (31) See: Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (193/3).
- (32) Reported by al-Bukhārī (1164/3), H. 3017. Muslim (986/2), H. 1353.
- (33) Nuzha al-a‘yun an-nawāzīr fī ‘ilm al-wujūh wa an-nazā’ir, p. 201.
- (34) Maqāyys al-lugha (1298).
- (35) Asās al-balāgha (49/1).

- (36) Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (241/30).
- (37) Tafsīr al-Baghawī (504/4).
- (38) See: Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (242/30); Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim (3447/10).
- (39) See: at-Tafsīr al-kabīr (11/32).
- (40) at-Taḥrīr wa at-tanwīr, Ibn 'Āshūr (317/25).
- (41) Al-Kashf wa al-bayān (231/7).
- (42) See: Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (91/26); Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim (2936/9).

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