

## Geographical Boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem

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The terms 'Jerusalem', 'Palestine', 'Syria' and 'Jordan' are mentioned daily in the press and in political discussion. Yet none are the indigenous names for the locations they are thought to represent. Syria has been reduced very much in size, Jordan is an area completely different from the area it once was, and Palestine has been given new borders that have taken areas from one side and added areas to another. These changes have mainly occurred in the twentieth century, as part of an overall change to the map of the region. This has caused much confusion and many contradictions, mainly when new terms have been introduced to replace ancient ones.

Such confusion is also encountered in the names given to 'Jerusalem', which has been given many names from the dawn of time. On the eve of the first Muslim conquest, and the five hundred years prior to that, the area was known as Aelia,<sup>1</sup> and continued with this name for some time under Muslim rule. With the rise of Islam, new terminologies were introduced in the

Qur'an such as *al-Ard al-Mubārakah*<sup>2</sup> and *al-Ard al-Muqadasah*<sup>3</sup>, along with other terminologies narrated in the Prophet's tradition, such as *Bayt al-Maqdis*,<sup>4</sup> and without excluding its common name of the time Aelia.<sup>5</sup>

From the time of the first Muslim conquest Muslims used a mixture of these terminologies. The terms predominantly in use were Aelia and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. This can be clearly seen in early Muslim literature<sup>6</sup> and in coinages that have reached us from that period.<sup>7</sup> Another development that can be traced back to the beginning of the third Muslim century, was the introduction of a new terminology. Evidence of this can be clearly attributed to the reign of Al-Ma'mūn, who ruled during 197-218 AH/ 813-833 CE. The first record of this occurred specifically in the year 217 AH/832 CE during which a coinage bearing the new name *al-Quds* was minted.<sup>8</sup> This immediately appeared in contemporary literature,<sup>9</sup> and could have probably been used prior to the date of its minting. This terminology continued to be used in later literature,<sup>10</sup> and became Islamic Jerusalem's most common name well before the Crusades.<sup>11</sup>

The name was taken a step further around the period of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (566-589 AH/ 1171-1193 CE) when the word *Sharīf* 'honoured' was attached to it, to try to elevate its significance during a period of foreign occupation; thus it

became *al-Quds al-Sharīf*.<sup>12</sup> This appeared in some literature during that period as well as in the post-Crusade literature, and continued to be used during the Mamlūk era.<sup>13</sup> The name was nearly always used during the Ottoman period in this form, since they used the term *Sharīf* with any name they wanted to exalt.<sup>14</sup>

These names were used in many different contexts to denote various meanings. In the Prophetic traditions, they were used interchangeably to refer to three areas; the Mosque, the City or the Region. In later eras this was also the case, the names of Islamicjerusalem being used to refer to the City or to the Region.

Nowadays when any of these terminologies is mentioned, for the majority of people including many prominent scholars, Islamicjerusalem is simply the Walled City.<sup>15</sup> This is natural because, whenever an important location is mentioned, humans tend to put stress on its most important part. As for Islamicjerusalem, its crown is the Walled City and the Mosque is its jewel. At this point many have become disoriented, from very early times even to the present day. To them, whenever any name of Islamicjerusalem is mentioned, only the Walled City springs to mind and nothing else. This unintentional oversight deprives Islamicjerusalem of many of its characteristics, such as its geographical space, as well as its historical, political and religious dimensions.

However, this study does not intend to study the historical, political or religious dimensions of Islamicjerusalem; the aim of this article is to investigate its geographic space. This will surely help in understanding the other aspects of Islamicjerusalem better.

### **The Problem of the Study**

The extent of the boundaries of Islamicjerusalem has not previously been studied thoroughly, and very little work has been written on this topic.<sup>16</sup> Early and later Muslim scholars have not attempted either to discuss it at length or resolve it fully, and have left many questions unanswered. This study is hoping to be one of main stepping stones towards understanding this topic and in contributing to and developing the new field of enquiry of Islamicjerusalem studies.

Without specifying the boundaries of this area, it would be extremely hard to fully understand all other aspects of Islamicjerusalem. Indeed, identifying the boundaries of Islamicjerusalem would explain many concepts that are still vague, such as what Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims meant whenever Islamicjerusalem was mentioned. This would in turn resolve many discrepancies on locations of birth, death,<sup>17</sup> residency, command, and so on. In addition, it would resolve many confusions and contradictions, over many issues. One being the conflicting of dates for the first Muslim conquest of

Islamic Jerusalem. Understanding the geographical space has proved to solve what was once thought to be historical contradictions, inaccuracies and confusions.<sup>18</sup>

The aim of this article, therefore, is to rediscover the boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem. This would in turn widen the scope of current research on Islamic Jerusalem from such a small section to the wide area it once was.

### **Accounts**

There are many accounts in Muslim literature that refer to Islamic Jerusalem as a large region. Some of these state this explicitly by providing the extent of its boundaries, while others refer to the region implicitly. Selections of both explicit and implicit accounts are to be examined in this article, and will be placed in a chronological order to be able to see the development and change in names throughout the different eras.

### **Prophetic traditions**

There are many Prophetic traditions which use the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* to refer to the Mosque, the City or the Region, interchangeably. However, it is difficult in many cases to decide which one the Prophet is referring to.<sup>19</sup> One clear tradition, which refers to a vast area, regards the conquest of Jericho by Prophet Joshua. In the authentic narration<sup>20</sup> Prophet Muhammad states:

إن الشمس لم تحبس لبشر إلا ليوشع ليالي سار إلى بيت المقدس  
the Sun was not held for any human except Yousha' (Joshua)  
when he was marching towards Bayt al-Maqdis<sup>21</sup>

The Prophet used the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* when addressing the area Joshua was marching to conquer. It is well known that Joshua is associated with the conquest of Jericho and not the Walled City of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. This is clear in many exegesis books, where Jericho is taken to be part of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.<sup>22</sup> Therefore it is clear that this narration is referring to the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

### Abū Baker

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, Abū Baker sent many armies into *al-Sham* (Historical Syria); he further sent reinforcement to them at different times. One of the reinforcements was sent from Iraq, headed by Khalid Ibn al-Walid. In the letter from Abū Baker to Khalid commanding him to leave Iraq and head to *al-Sham*, he states:

أن اعجل إلى إخوانكم بالشام فوالله لقرية من قرى أرض المقدس يفتحها الله تعالى  
أحب إليّ من رستاق عظيم من رساتيق العراق

Hurry to your brothers in al-Sham, by Allah, **one town from the towns of *Ard al-Maqdis***, Allah makes us conquer, is better to me than the conquest of a great province from the provinces of Iraq<sup>23</sup>

What can be understood from Abū Baker's statement is that *Ard al-Maqdis* was a vast area which consisted of many towns and villages and not a mere city. This is the first time, however, that we have reference to this area as *Ard al-Maqdis* (the land of *Al-Maqdis*); it has many connections with the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* and can possibly be equated to mean the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

In addition to these narrations from this period, there are many more on the wide region of Aelia, that extended from Caesarea in the north to Ajnadīn in the South,<sup>24</sup> overlapping with the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

### **Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d. 150 AH/ 767 CE)**

Some traditions on the excellences of Islamic Jerusalem are attributed to Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān. Numerous scholars quote these, specifically when talking about the excellences of Islamic Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> These are very long, but few sentences have been chosen which indicate that *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Islamic Jerusalem) is a large region and is much more than simply the Walled City.

- وهاجر إبراهيم من كوثاربا إلى بيت المقدس.
- Abraham migrated from *Kuthā(rbā)* to *Bayt al-Maqdis*.
- وأوصى إبراهيم وإسحاق لما ماتا أن يدفنا في أرض بيت المقدس.
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ordered to be buried in the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

- وقوله (ادخلوا الأرض المقدسة...) هي بيت المقدس.
- And the Holy Land in the verse (Qur'an 5:21) is *Bayt al-Maqdis*.
- وقوله لبني إسرائيل (ادخلوا هذه القرية...) هي بيت المقدس.
- And the meaning of the town in the verse (Qur'an 2:85) is *Bayt al-Maqdis*.
- وولد عيسى ببيت المقدس.
- Jesus was born in *Bayt al-Maqdis*.
- ويقتل عيسى الدجال في أرض بيت المقدس.
- Jesus will kill the *dajal* (antichrist) in *Bayt al-Maqdis*.
- والمحشر والمنشر إلى بيت المقدس.
- The gathering of the dead and their resurrection will be to *Bayt al-Maqdis*.<sup>26</sup>

Most of the above statements are not related at all to the Walled City of Islamic Jerusalem. In actual fact these have either happened or will happen in its region; in Hebron, Jericho, Bethlehem, and Lud. Therefore, here we have further confirmation that Islamic Jerusalem was considered a vast region.

So far we have had many narrations that indicate that Islamic Jerusalem extended to cover much more than the Walled City, indeed to cover a vast area around it. However, none of these narrations map out and define its boundaries. On the other hand, some of the following narrations do exactly that and map out the extent of its boundaries.

## Al-Maqdisī (d.390 AH/ 1000 CE)

Al-Maqdisī, as well as being one of the greatest geographers ever,<sup>27</sup> has the most comprehensive account on the extent of the boundary limits of IslamicJerusalem. Al-Maqdisī's account is unique; no other scholar has given such a detailed description of the boundaries of IslamicJerusalem. In his book *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rīfat al-Aqālīm*, he starts the section on *Bayt al-Maqdis* by giving a very detailed description of the Walled City and its surroundings, he then expands into discussing the whole region; he says:

وحدُّ القُدُس ما حول إيليا إلى أربعين ميلاً يدخل في ذلك القصبه ومدنها واثنا عشر ميلاً في البحر وصَعْر ومآب وخمسة أميال من البادية ومن قبل القبلة إلى ما وراء الكُسَيْفَه وما يحاذيها ومن قبل الشمال تخوم نابلس وهذه الأرض مباركة كما قال الله تعالى مشجرة الجبال زريعة السهول من غير سقي ولا أنهار ...

The limits of *al-Quds* extend over the area around *Aelia* up to forty miles, including *al-qasaba* and its towns, and twelve miles into *al-Bahr*, plus *Şughar* and *Ma'āb* and five miles from *al-Badya*. In the direction of *Qibla* it extends to beyond *al-Kusayfa* and the land around it. To the north it reaches the limits of Nablus. This Land is *Mubarakah* as Allah -may He be exalted- Has stated, its mountains are covered with trees, and its plains are cultivated without the need for irrigation nor water from the rivers....<sup>28</sup>

The name al-Maqdisī uses here for the region is *al-Quds*, and for the city he uses *Aelia*. These two names were among

others that he used for the area of Islamic Jerusalem. At the beginning of his book he mentions many names for the same place:

بيت المقدس ايليا القدس البلاط  
*Bayt al-Maqdis, Aelia, al-Quds, al-Balāṭ.*”<sup>29</sup>

Al-Maqdisī alternates between the first three names, not keeping to one for a particular meaning. For example, sometimes he uses Aelia to represent the city, while at other times he uses Aelia to denote the region.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Maqdisī divides his statement into two parts. The first is relatively short; in it he gives the name of the region, and the central point from where the measurement is to be taken. In addition, he gives a numerical dimension of the region, which is understood to fluctuate<sup>31</sup>; in some directions it can reach up to a maximum of forty miles, while in other directions it might be less. Not necessarily meaning a circle, this could mean an irregular circle or an oval. Moreover, a circle with the maximum extent of a forty-mile radius has been drawn onto the map (Map 1) to demonstrate the maximum coverage in any direction. As for what is the modern equivalent of the –Arab-mile used by al-Maqdisī, this was found to be 2126 metres.<sup>32</sup>

In the second part of al-Maqdisī’s account, he gives a detailed description of the area covered. He starts at the west by including *al-Ramlah (al-Qasabah*<sup>33</sup>), and its towns and cities.

He extend this further to include twelve miles from the Mediterranean Sea (*al-Bahr*<sup>34</sup>).

To the **east** he includes Zoar (*Ṣuḡhar*), which he locates as the capital of *Jund al-Sharāh* at the southern end of the Dead Sea.<sup>35</sup> It is known Biblically as Bela;<sup>36</sup> today it is located near *Ghor al-Ṣafī* on the southern shores of the Dead Sea. The other town al-Maqdisī also includes on the eastern side is Ma'āb. This town is also part of the province of al-Sharāh and is close to al-Badiya (the desert).<sup>37</sup> Under the Roman rule Ma'āb used to be known as Rabbath Moba.<sup>38</sup> It is known today as *al-Rabbah*, 17.5 kilometres north of al-Karak.<sup>39</sup> The boundary of Islamic Jerusalem does not stop here as al-Maqdisī prolongs it for another five miles into the desert after this town.<sup>40</sup>

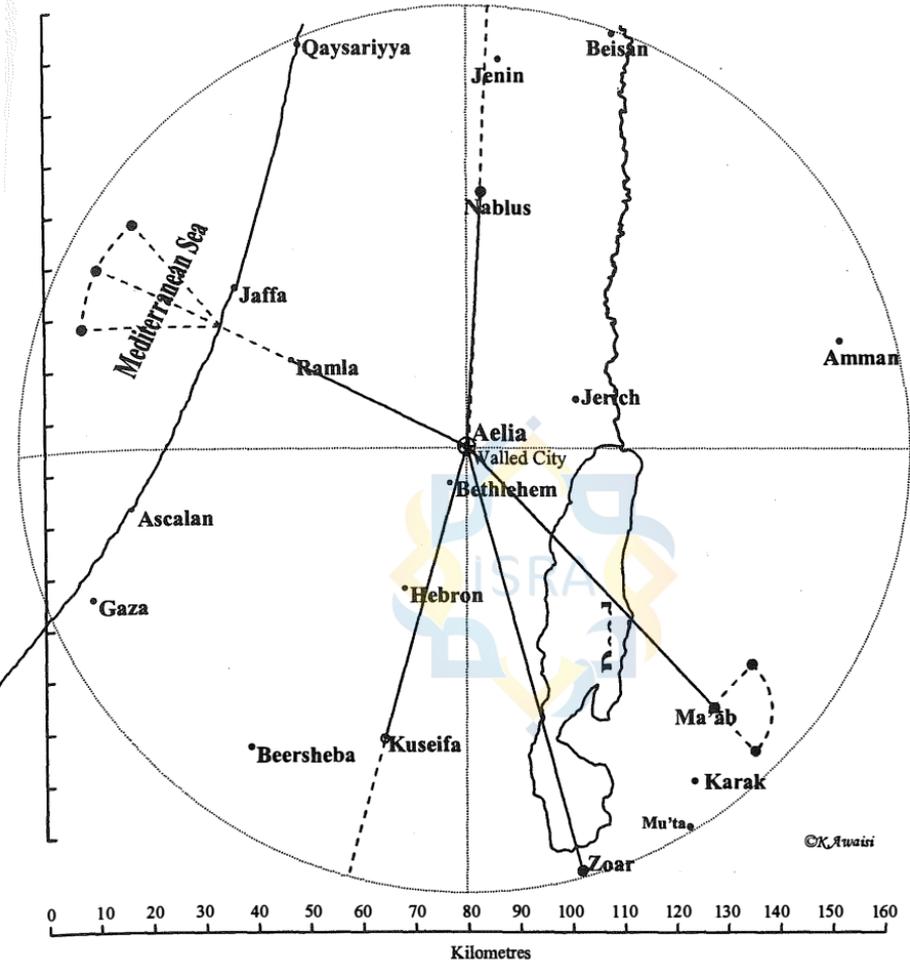
To the **south** –*Qibla* (direction to Makkah)-, al-Maqdisī states that the boundaries extend to beyond al-Kuseifa and the land around it. Al-Kuseifa has preserved its name from the Muslim conquest until the present time. It lies thirty kilometres east of Beersheba. However, al-Maqdisī did not specify how much beyond al-Kuseifa the boundaries extended to. It could mean a maximum of forty miles in this direction or to the area parallel to Zoar. All these are mere speculations, as there is no solid evidence for any of them; but what is certain is that Islamic Jerusalem includes al-Kuseifa and the area adjacent to it.

To the **north**, the boundaries extend to the borders of Nablus. Al-Maqqdisī does not specify clearly any city or village which the boundaries reach, or whether those boundaries end at the inner border with Nablus, i.e. south of Nablus, or whether they are the northern borders of Nablus, i.e. including the city. Both are extremely hard to define, as the borders of Nablus itself have changed with time. Therefore the boundaries could be either of these, or they could reach to a maximum extent of forty-mile in this direction as well, which would definitely include Nablus and beyond.

Al-Maqqdisī's goes on to comment briefly on some of the features of this region. He states: "this land is *mubarak* (blessed)", meaning that everything within those boundaries is blessed; however this does not limit the *barakah* to this region only. If he had said: "this is *al-Ard al-Mubarakah* (the blessed land)", he would have meant only this specific region. Therefore the blessed land extends far beyond those boundaries; this area is only a part of *al-Ard al-Mubarakah*.

From the descriptive information and dimensions given by al-Maqqdisī, a map was drawn to illustrate the locations included in this region, as well as to understand the extent to which the dimensions would have reached; see Map 1.

## Geographical Boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem



Map 1: al-Maqdisī's boundaries, with lines to named locations.  
 Dotted lines show the possible extent in these directions  
 The outer circle shows the maximum extent with a 40 –Arab- mile radius.

The map above shows the Walled City in the centre of a circle that has a forty-mile radius (Arab). This is the maximum extent to which Islamic Jerusalem could reach in every direction. Lines were then taken from the centre and extended to the five areas al-Maqdisī describes: Ramla and the Sea, Zoar, Ma'āb, Kuseifa, and Nablus. The dotted lines illustrate the possible

extent to which the limits could reach; al-Maqdisī does not specify precisely where they extend in these directions.

We can be certain that the sites named by al-Maqdisī and locations which lie between the Walled City of Islamic Jerusalem and the named site will also be part of this region. It can also be seen from the map that three of the positions named by al-Maqdisī lie very close to the maximum extent of the circle. This is very clear in the case of Zoar, which lies almost on the circle, and to a lesser extent with Ma'āb and the Sea.

This account gives a very close approximation of what lies within the region of Islamic Jerusalem; however, in some directions it is not very clear where the boundaries extend to. Some other accounts clarify a few of these points, as can be seen in the following.

### **Ibn al-Murajjā (d.~492 AH/ 1099 CE)**

Ibn al-Murajjā gives many narrations which indicate that Islamic Jerusalem is a wide region; some of these have been mentioned in the narrations of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān. In addition, he gives an account that includes Nablus to Islamic Jerusalem:

أحب البلاد إلى الله تعالى الشام، وأحب الشام إلى الله تعالى القدس، وأحب القدس  
إلى الله تعالى جبل نابلس...

The most beloved land to Almighty Allah is *al-Sham*, and the most beloved land in *al-Sham* to Almighty Allah is *al-Quds*,

and the most beloved part of *al-Quds* to Allah Almighty is the  
mount of Nablus...<sup>41</sup>

In this account Ibn al-Murajjā also uses the name al-Quds to refer to this region, and includes Nablus as a very crucial part of the region of Islamic Jerusalem. Thus resolving the uncertainty in al-Maqdisī's account, as to whether Nablus is included or not. This is further supported by other accounts to follow.

### Al-Ḥamawī (d. 626 AH/ 1229AD)

In al-Ḥamawī's geographical dictionary, under the word *al-Maqdis*, he talks of a large area; he states:

والذي شاهدته أنا منها أن أرضها وضياعها وقرها كلها جبال شامخة  
وليس حولها ولا بالقرب منها أرض وطيبة البته وزروعها على الجبال و  
... وأما نفس المدينة فهي على فضاء في وسط تلك الجبال.

What I saw from it, is that its land, and towns are all in high mountains, and there is not around it nor close by it, a low land at all, even its plantations are in the mountains.... As for the city itself it is in an open space in the middle of these mountains.<sup>42</sup>

From the above passage, it can be seen that al-Ḥamawī is talking about a large mountainous area, and that he distinguishes between the city and the region. Another important point in his statement is that he states that the city is set in the middle of mountains. This is to some degree very true, as the Walled City lies in the middle of mountains that are interconnected and extend from Nablus in the north to the Negev Desert in the south.

It seems from his statement that he does not consider the Dead Sea basin, which is a very low-lying area, or the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, or the Negev Desert to be part of Islamic Jerusalem. Rather it seems that he takes Islamic Jerusalem to be only up to the end of the mountainous area on each side, and therefore just before the Dead Sea and the River Jordan to the east. To the west this area would not include the cities on the seashore. To the south, it would probably extend to the end of the mountainous area on this side, which is the start of the desert at al-Kuseifa. However, some may argue that this could apply only to the close vicinity of the city and not as far as this. This can be counter argued on the basis of another passage in which al-Ḥamawī includes the city of Hebron, where he clearly states:

حبرون: اسم القرية التي فيها إبراهيم الخليل، عليه السلام، بالبيت المقدس، ...

Hebron: Is the name of the town, where Abraham (PBUH) is

within *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*.<sup>43</sup>

He extends this area further south of Hebron to a place called Yaqīn; he says:

ياقين: من قرى بيت المقدس، ...

Yaqīn: one of the villages of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.<sup>44</sup>

As to the north he extends this region to include Nablus, as he also makes clear in another section of his book:

It is also important to note that al-Ḥamawī states clearly, at the start of his passage, that this is only what he was able to see from this land. This shows that he was uncertain and could mean that this land might have been much larger from the east and the west.

Therefore, al-Ḥamawī also thought of Islamic Jerusalem as a large region that extended to cover a large area from Nablus to the north to beyond Hebron to the south.

#### Al-Tifashī (d.651 AH/ 1251 CE)

Another person to give dimensions to the extent of this land was al-Tifashī. However, it should be noted that the original text of al-Tifashī was unobtainable, as only some of his work has survived. His works, such as the passage below, have reached us only through those scholars who have quoted him. This text was quoted by Ibn Fadullah al-‘Amrī (d.749 AH/1348 CE):

ذَكَرْتُ الرُّوَاةَ أَنَّ هَذِهِ الْأَرْضَ الَّتِي بَارَكَ اللَّهُ فِيهَا وَحَوْلَهَا أَرْبَعُونَ مَيْلًا طَوَّلًا فِي  
أَرْبَعِينَ مَيْلًا عَرْضًا فِي تَدْوِيرِ الْبَيْتِ الْمُقَدَّسِ، وَالْبَيْتِ الْمُقَدَّسِ فِي وَسْطِهَا. وَكَانَ  
اسْمُهَا فِي الزَّمَنِ الْأَوَّلِ إِبِلْيَاءَ، وَقَوْلُ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى يُحَقِّقُ أَنَّ بَيْتَ الْمُقَدَّسِ فِي وَسْطِ  
تَرْبِيعِ الْأَرْضِ الْمُقَدَّسَةِ الَّتِي بَارَكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِيهَا.

The narrators have said that this is a land which Allah has placed *Bārakah* in and around, forty miles in length, by forty

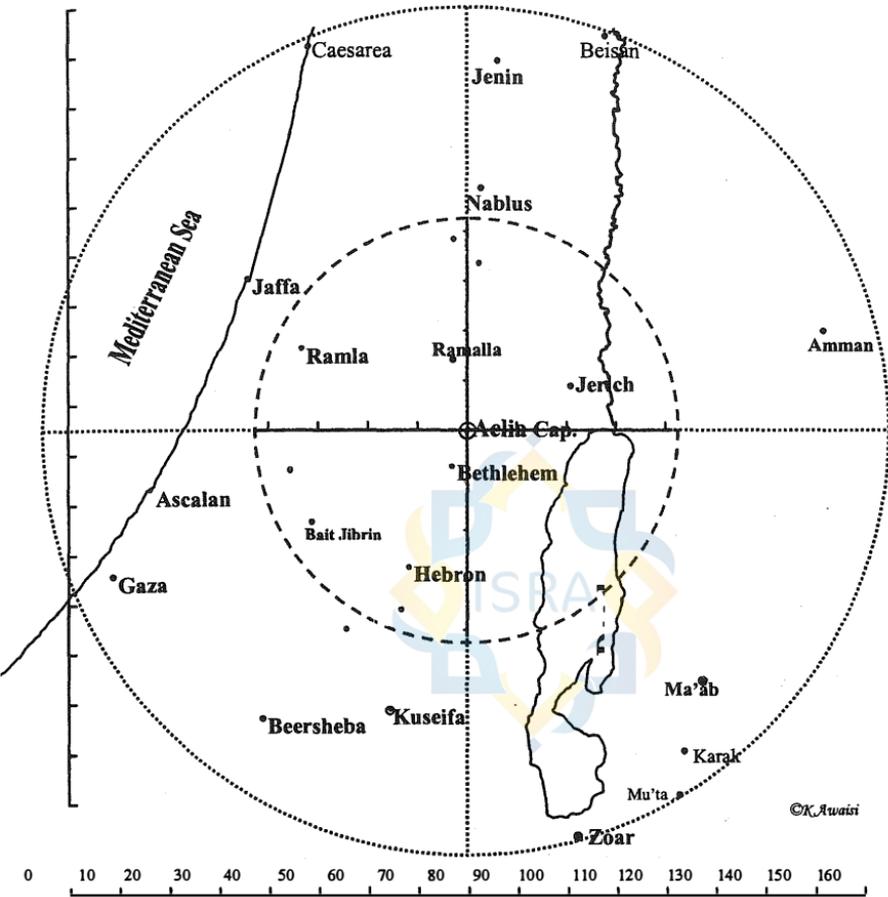
miles in breadth, in circles around the Holy House (al-Aqsa Mosque), with the Holy House in its centre. Its previous name was Aelia, The saying of Allah –May He be Exalted- confirms that *Bayt al-Maqdis*(the city) lies in the centre of the Holy Land which Allah has blessed.<sup>46</sup>

Al-Tifashī is using many terms within his text and is referring to many sites. He refers to the land which God blessed in and around (*Bārak fīhā wa hawlahā*); he also refers to *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (Holy House= al-Aqsa Mosque), then Aelia (the region), *Bayt al-Maqdis* (the city) and, finally, *al-Ard al-Muqaddasah* (Holy Land).

From the first words in the passage, it is not clear what exactly is being referred to here, as al-Tifashī mentions *the land* in the implicit pronoun, without specifying which land. And we do not have the full text to see what was written prior to this statement. Moreover, al-‘Amrī places this quotation at the start of his section about *al-Quds*. Therefore we can assume that al-Tifashī was also talking about *al-Quds*.

In short, it can be understood from al-Tifashī’s statement that *al-Quds* is limited to forty miles in width and forty in breadth in a circle, with al-Aqsa Mosque at its centre. However, the question that arises here: is the forty miles the radius or diameter of this circle (Map 2)?

## Geographical Boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem



Map 2: boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem (Tifashī),  
Inner circle at 20 –Arab- miles radius; Outer circle at 40 –Arab- miles radius

Linguistically, whether this refers to a radius or a diameter is not very clear. Therefore, both can be assumed. However, in the following statement he states that this area was known in the past as Aelia; thus equating the boundaries of the region of *al-Quds* to those of Aelia. Aelia, according to Muslim sources, was a large region that extended from Caesarea to Ajnādīn at the time of the Muslim Conquest.<sup>47</sup> This in turn would be greater

than the twenty-mile radius (inner circle). Moreover Caesarea lies very close to the outer circle as is clear from the map above. Therefore, this would correspond to the outer circle with the forty-mile radius.

This, in turn, would be the same as the dimensions of al-Maqdisī, who also gives a forty-mile radius for his measurements though not in every direction. This could also apply to al-Tifashī's account, since Muslim sources did not include sites part of Palestina Secunda or Tertia as being within the region of Aelia. This means that possibly it did not extend to the maximum in every direction. This could be possible, as there might have been a continuation of or a further explanation in the quotation that has not reached us.

### **Ibn Shadād (d.684 AH/ 1285 CE)**

'Izz al-Din Ibn Shadād narrates an account that includes Hebron in the land of Islamic Jerusalem; he says, under the listing of Hebron:

قبور الخليل وولديه إسحق ويعقوب عليهم الصلاة والسلام- وهم مجتمعون في  
مغارة بأرض بيت المقدس

The graves of Abraham and his two sons Isaac and Jacob (peace be upon them) are together in a cave in the Land of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, he includes the city of Hebron as being part of the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. However, this is all he mentioned in

this regard, adding nothing further. It is only a passing comment.

### Al-‘Amrī (d.749 AH/1349 CE)

Al-‘Amrī was another of those to give a detailed account of to where the boundaries of IslamicJerusalem extended. Although Al-‘Amrī quotes the boundaries given by al-Tifashī, he still gives his own account of the boundaries of IslamicJerusalem, which is slightly different; he says:

"والقدس الشريف الأرض المقدسة مشتملة على مدينة القدس وما حوله إلى نهر الأردن المسمى بالشرية إلى فلسطين المسماة بالرملة طولاً، ومن البحر الشامي إلى مدائن لوط عرضاً، غالبها جبالٌ وأوديةٌ إلا ما في جنباتها"

"*Al-Quds al-Sharīf*; the holy land encompasses the city of *al-Quds*, and the area around it up to the River Jordan which is named *al-Shari'ah*, up to Palestine which is named *Al-Ramlah* in width, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the cities of Lot in breadth, and most of this land is hills and valleys, except what is on the sides."<sup>49</sup>

Al-‘Amrī was probably the first scholar to explicitly state that the region of *al-Quds al-Sharīf* and the Holy Land are an identical entity, which he then goes on to describe. It seems that Al-‘Amrī noticed some of the confusions over the dimensions. That is probably why in his account he did not provide any dimensions at all of this area, rather he gave only a description of what was within this region. Thus he narrowed down the large circle of al-Tifashī in some directions. Al-‘Amrī's account

is very similar to the description of al-Maqdisī, as he names some of the locations named by al-Maqdisī, but gives a briefer description.

Al-‘Amrī, however, also fails in his account to specify the exact extent of the boundaries to the north. Nevertheless, in another statement, he includes Nablus as being part of Islamic Jerusalem:

وإلى جانب القدس مدينة نابلس محسوبة على الأرض المقدسة وداخلة في حدودها  
To the side of *al-Quds* lies Nablus which is regarded as part of  
*al-Ard al-Muqadasah*, and is within its boundaries.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition al-‘Amrī does not specify the region as being only mountainous as al-Ḥamawī did, but that it is mountainous though not in its outer areas. If al-‘Amrī’s account were to be combined with al-Tifashī’s this would be very similar to al-Maqdisī’s, except for some minor differences.

### Al-Qalaqashandī (d.821 AH/ 1418 CE)

This account is precisely the same as the account of Al-‘Amrī, with very few differences:

"والأرض المقدسة مشتملة على بيت المقدس وما حوله، إلى نهر الأردن المسعى  
بالشريعة، إلى مدينة الرملة طولاً، ومن البحر الشامي إلى مدائن لوط عليه السلام،  
وغالبها جبال وأودية إلا ما هو في جنباتها"

“The Holy Land includes *Bayt al-Maqdis* and what is around it, up to the river Jordan named *al-Shari‘ah*, up to the city of al-Ramlah in width, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the

cities of Lot, and most of this land is hills and valleys, except what is on the sides.”<sup>51</sup>

The only difference here is the removal of the term *al-Quds al-Sharīf*. However, everything else is the same bar some change in the terminologies used. Al-Qalaqashandī used *Bayt al-Maqdis* instead of *madinat al-Quds*; he also emitted the word *filisteen*, and replaced it only with *al-Ramlah*. It seems obvious that he just quoted al-‘Amrī without much difference in the resulting content.

### Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Askalānī (d. 852 AH/ 1449 CE)

Ibn Ḥajar was a very famous scholar who was born in Egypt, though his ancestors were originally from Ascalan, a city on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, about 18 Km north of Gaza city. It is said that his ancestors moved from the city when Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn destroyed it nearly two hundred years before the time of Ibn Ḥajar.<sup>52</sup> In a line of poetry he says about himself:

وَبِمِصْرَ مَوْلِدُهُ وَأَصْلُ جُدُودِهِ      مِنْ عَسْقَلَانَ الْمَقْدِسِيَّةِ قَدْ بَدِي<sup>53</sup>

In this line of poetry he associates Ascalan and his ancestors with Islamic Jerusalem. This city is about sixty-five Kilometres south-west of the city of Islamic Jerusalem; however, he still considers it to be a Jerusalemite city.

In another section of his books he writes about another site that is also part of this region; he mentions the location of the birth of Jesus as being within Islamic Jerusalem, stating:

... ولدته بيت لحم من بيت المقدس

...She gave birth to him in Bethlehem within *Bayt al-Maqdis*<sup>54</sup>

From these two statements, it is very clear that Ibn Ḥajar is also taking about a vast area that extends to include the two locations mentioned.

### Discussion of accounts

First of all, the names used in the accounts for Islamic Jerusalem vary. Prophet Muhammad referred to this area as *Bayt al-Maqdis*, Abū Baker called it *Ard al-Maqdis*, al-Maqdisī named it *al-Quds*, while al-Tifashī did not specify a certain name, but mentioned its previous name, which was *Aelia*. However, the person quoting al-Tifashī places it in the beginning of the section on *al-Quds*. As for al-‘Amrī, he mentioned it as *al-Quds al-Sharīf*, and then equated it to *al-Ard al-Muqadasah*. Those who came after him skipped the first part, and started using only *al-Ard al-Muqadasah*. Therefore, the names used to refer to this area have changed with time, developing from earlier names and sometimes becoming new names.

Most of the accounts give only a rough estimation of the extent of the boundaries, while a few give a more precise

estimate of the extent. Al-Maqqdisī's account seems to be the most accurate, since he came from that part of the world, and had a first-hand experience of the area. As for later scholars, it seems that they themselves did not measure the area, but took measurements from others. This was not the case with everyone; al-'Amrī, for example, skipped narrating the dimensions and concentrated only on the descriptions of that area.

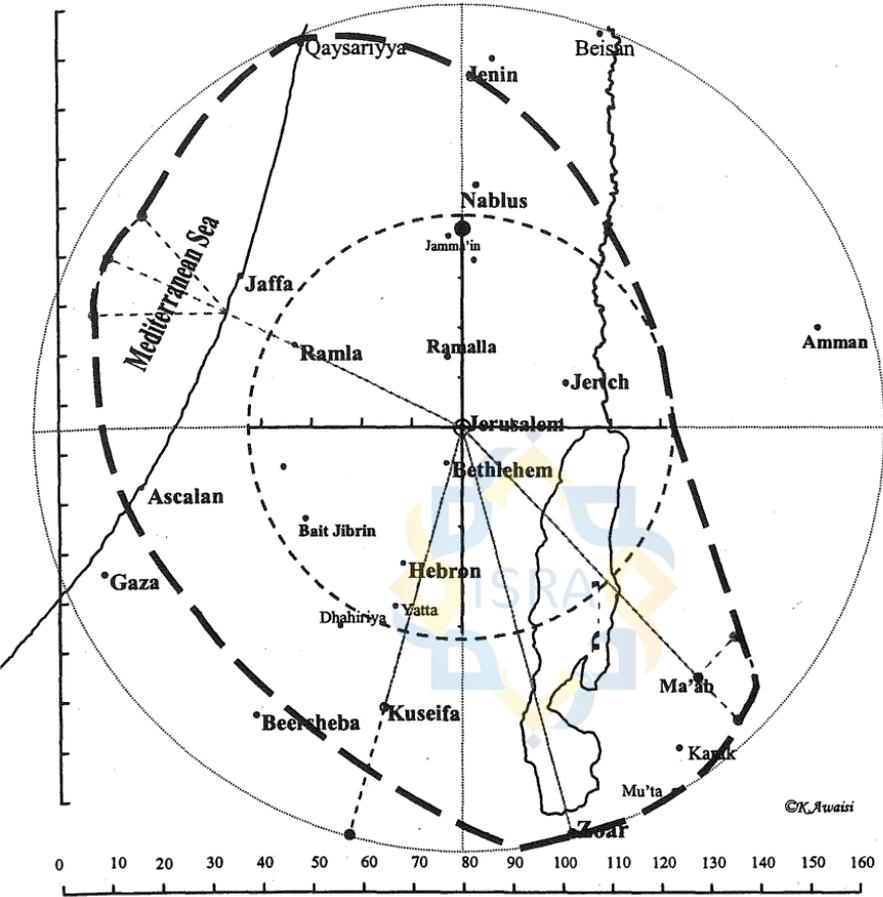
The measurements presented by al-Maqqdisī correspond with the description he gave; this was so when the Arab mile used by al-Maqqdisī was employed. This therefore strengthens the argument concerning the accuracy of the dimensions given, and resolves what is believed to be a contradiction in al-Maqqdisī's account.<sup>55</sup> This further proves that al-Maqqdisī meant a forty-mile radius and not a diameter. The maximum distance from the centre was to Zoar, which was calculated at 82.8Km, slightly less than the maximum possible distance at 85.04Km.

Consequently, the researcher argues that al-Maqqdisī's account is the most accurate. As well as his being the earliest scholar to have given the extent of the boundaries. However, there are a few flaws within the account, and by mingling al-Maqqdisī's account with the other accounts, some sites which were not apparent in al-Maqqdisī's account are clarified.

On the basis of these accounts, a map of the extent of the area of Islamic Jerusalem was drawn (Map3). However, there are still some areas that are not included, as there is no substantial information from the above accounts to include them; cities such as Jenin, Beisan, Gaza, Beersheba and Amman.



## Geographical Boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem



Map 3: boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem (researcher), blue dashed line. inner circle at 20 Arab miles radius; outer circle at 40 Arab miles radius.

## Conclusion

From the above accounts it is clear that Islamic Jerusalem –whether referred to as *Bayt al-Maqdis*, *Ard al-Maqdis*, *al-Quds* or *al-Quds al-Sharīf*- was not considered as being simply the Walled City or its close surroundings throughout the Muslim eras. In fact, it was found that Islamic Jerusalem included many

cities and towns beside the Walled City of Islamic Jerusalem such as Ascalon, Ramla, Jaffa, Nablus, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, Kuseifa, Zoar, Ma'ab, and many more (Map 3).

Unlike the administrative boundaries that changed frequently under different reigns, these boundaries seemed to have not changed and can be compared to those of the *Haram* boundaries in Makkah which cover a large extent of area besides the city of Makkah and that of the *Haram* in Madina; in both cases the boundaries were set and never changed.

The researcher strongly recommends that any studies of Islamic Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*), that are carried out must take it as one entity rather than dividing it up into small fragments and studying these separately. This would enrich research on this topic from all aspects. Also studying Islamic Jerusalem as one entity has proved to resolve many misunderstandings about its history which were believed to be historical contradictions and inconsistencies.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, A. *Tarīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, edited by T. al-Mustafa, Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi (Beirut 1999) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Vol.1, p.198. (Hereafter cited as: Ibn Khaldūn, *Tarīkh*). Wilkinson, J. 'Jerusalem under Rome and Byzantium', in K. 'Asali (ed.) *Jerusalem in History*, Olive Branch Press (New York 1990) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.88.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-'Ard al-Latī barakna fīhā* (the land which We blessed) Qur'an 7:137. 21:71,81. 34:18; also *al-Aqsa al-Lathī barakna hawlah* (Al-Aqsa which We blessed around).

- <sup>3</sup> *Al-'Ard al-Muqadasah* (the Holy Land) Qur'an 5:21.
- <sup>4</sup> Al-Bukharī, M. *Ṣahih Al-Bukharī*, edited by I. Jāqān, Dār Ishbīlīa (Riyadh 1979) Vol.2, Book 20, p.58. No.6, and Vol.5, pp.224, 225. (Hereafter cited as: Al-Bukharī, *Ṣahih*). Muslim, M. *Ṣahih Muslim*, edited by A. Siddiqi, Adam Publishers and distributors (Delhi 1996) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Vol.1, Book:5, Section:2, p.305 (Hereafter cited as: Muslim, *Ṣahih*).
- <sup>5</sup> Al-Bukharī, *Ṣahih*, Vol.5, p.224.
- <sup>6</sup> Al-Tel, O. *The First Islamic Conquest of Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem): A Critical Analytical Study of the Early Islamic Historical Narratives and Sources*, Al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press (Dundee 2003), p.291. (Hereafter cited as: al-Tel, *Conquest*).
- <sup>7</sup> Meshorer, Y. 'Coinage of Jerusalem Under the Umayyads and the Abbāsids', in J. Praver, and H. Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: the early Muslim Period 638-1099*, New York University Press (New York 1996), pp. 415-418.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.419.
- <sup>9</sup> Imam Muslim (d. 261 AH/875 CE) named a section: 'the change of direction of prayer from *al-Quds* to *al-Kabba*'. See: Muslim, *Ṣahih*, Vol.1, Book 5, Section 2, p.305.
- <sup>10</sup> Al-Maqdisī, M. *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-Aqālīm*, edited by M. Goeje, Brill (Leiden 1906) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 30, 173. (Hereafter cited as al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan*); Al-Maqdisī, al-Mutahar. *al-Bid' wa al-Tarīkh*, Dar Ṣādir (Beruit 1899), Vol.6, p.91.; Ibn al-Mūrajjā, I. *Fadā'il Bayt al-Maqdis wal-Khalīl wa fadā'il al-Shām*, edited by O. Livne-Kafri, Aimashreq Ltd. (Shfaram 1995), pp.42, 44, 177, 227, 306. (Hereafter cited as Ibn al-Mūrajjā, *Fadā'il*).
- <sup>11</sup> Khisrū, N. *Safir Namah*, , <http://www.alwaraq.com>, pp.19-20.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibn Shadad, B., *Sirat Ṣalah al-Din Al-Ayoubī*, Dar al-Manar (Cairo 2001), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, pp. 7, 11, 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Al-'Amrī, A. *Masalik al-Abṣar fī Mamalik al-Amṣar*, Al-Markaz al-Islami Lil-Bahth (Beirut 1986), p.209.
- <sup>14</sup> Al-Ḥanbalī, Mujir al-Din, *Al-Uns al-Jalīl bī-Tarīkh al-Quds wal-Khalīl*, edited by A. Abū Tabanieh, Maktabat Dandīs (Hebron 1999), Vol.1, pp. 63, 472. (Hereafter cited as Al-Hanbalī, *Al-Uns*).

- 15 Al-Tel, *Conquest*, p.43; El-Awaisi. K. *The geographical boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem*. (Dundee 2003), Mlitt diss. Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Abertay Dundee. (unpublished), p.4 (Hereafter cited as El-Awaisi, K. *The Geographical Boundaries*); Abd al-Aziz, S. *The Usage and Understanding of the Term Islamicjerusalem*, Conference paper during conference titled “Islamicjerusalem Studies: Definition and Approaches”. Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, UK on 6 June 2005, p.22.
- 16 Al-Tel, *Conquest*, p. 44. Only a chapter within al-Tel’s book was on this subject, and the researchers Mlitt. dissertation.
- 17 There are many conflicting accounts on where ‘Ubadah ibn al-Ṣamit passed away; some say it was al-Ramlah, while others say it was *Bayt al-Maqdis*. If al-Ramlah is found to be part of Islamicjerusalem, then this discrepancy would be resolved.
- 18 Al-Tel has solved many in his recent book: *The First Islamic Conquest of Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem): A Critical Analytical Study of the Early Islamic Historical Narratives and Sources*.
- 19 See El-Awaisi, K. *The usage of the Names of Islamic Jerusalem in the early Muslim Period*, Conference paper during conference entitled “Islamicjerusalem Studies: Definition and Approaches”. Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, UK on Monday 6 June 2005, p.2. (Hereafter cited as El-Awaisi, K. *Usage of Names*).
- 20 This Hadith is authentic on the conditions of al-Bukharī. Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Niyhayah*, Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah (Beirut 1997) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol.1, p.281.
- 21 Ibn Ḥanbal, Ahmad, *al-Musnad*, edited by: A. Shakir, Dar al-Ḥadīth (Cairo 1995), Vol.8, p.275 # 8298.
- 22 See exegesis on verses 2:58; 5:21; 7:161.
- 23 Ibn al-Murajjā, I. *Fadā’il*, p.55; in another print it is quoted as *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* rather than *Ard al-Maqdis*.
- 24 El-Awaisi, K. *Usage of Names*, pp.17-26.
- 25 There are many scholars who quote some of the points below; others mention some as being solid facts. Al-Bakrī, A. *Mu’jam ma Istu’jim min Asm’i al-Bliḻād wal-Mawādi’*, edited by J. Talab, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya (Beirut 1998), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Vol.1, pp.206.; Al-Khawarizmī, M. *Itharat al-Targhīb wal-Tashwīq ilā Tarīkh Al-Masajid al-Thalatha wal-Bayt al-‘Atīq*, edited by S. Hassan, Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah (Beirut

- 2000) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.430. (Hereafter cited as Al-Khawarizmī, M. *Itharat al-Targhīb*)
- 26 Ibn al-Murajjā, *Fadā'il*, pp. 260-262; Ibn Al-Jawzī, 'A. *Tarīkh Bayt al-Maqdis*, edited by M. 'Azab, Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyah, (Cairo n.d.), pp.71-73.; Al-Khawarizmī, M. *Itharat al-Targhīb*, pp. 428-430.; Al-Nabulsi, 'A. *Al-Ḥadhrāh al-Unsiyah fī al-Rihlah al-Qudsīyah*, edited by A. Al-'Ulūbī, Al-Masader (Beirut 1990) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, pp. 29-31.
- 27 Krachkovski, I. *Tarīkh al-Adab al-Jography al-'Arabī*, translated by: S. O. Hāshim, Matba'at lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashir (Cairo 1963), pp. 208-209.
- 28 Al-Maqdisī, M. *Aḥsan*, p. 173.
- 29 Ibid., p.30.
- 30 Ibid., pp.28, 29.
- 31 This was derived from the usage of the word "ilā" in Arabic which means "up to".
- 32 El-Awaisi. K. *The geographical boundaries*, pp.10-24.
- 33 Al-Qasaba (capital -of Palestine-) is explained as being al-Ramlah in many places within Al-Maqdisī's book. Al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan*, pp. 154,164, 176.
- 34 The researcher arrived at the conclusion that *al-Baḥr* is the Mediterranean Sea since this is the only sea to the west, although Al-Maqdisī jumps straight to the eastern side, though the waters in that area are not called sea. On the eastern side it is the Dead Sea, which used to be called the *al-Buḥayrah al-Muntinah* 'the Stinking Loch'; sometimes the lower part of it is known as *al-Buḥayrah al-Maqlūbah* 'the Upturned Loch'. Whenever he mentions the word *al-Baḥr* 'the Sea' in this contexts he means the Roman Sea, today known as the Mediterranean Sea. See al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan*, pp. 152, 162, 163,164, 174.
- 35 Al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan*, p. 155; compare also with 'Arrāf, S. *Jund filistīn wa al-urden fī al-Adab al-gography al-Islami* Dār al-Shafaq (Kufur Qar' 1990), pp.107, 142.
- 36 MacDonald, B. *East of the Jordan Territories and sites of the Hebrew scriptures*, American School of Oriental Research, (Boston 2002) pp.209, 212. (Hereafter cited as MacDonald, B. *East of the Jordan*).

- 37 Al-Maḳḳdisī is also cited to have stated in his book that this town Ma'āb is situated in the mountains with many villages belonging to it, one being the village of Mu'ta. Al-Maḳḳdisī, *Aḥsan*, pp. 155, 178; Al-Ḥamawī, Y. *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, edited by A. Al-Jundī, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya (Beirut 1990) Vol.5, pp. 37, 254. (Hereafter cited as Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*).
- 38 MacDonald, B. *East of the Jordan*, p.211.
- 39 Ibn Shadād. M. *Al-A'lāq al-Khatira fī 'Umara' al-Sham wal-Jazeera*, edited by S. Al-Dahān, Al-Ma'had al-Faransī lill-Dirasāt al-'Arabiyah (Damascus 1962), p.83. (Hereafter cited as Ibn Shadād. M. *Al-A'lāq al-Khatira*); Al-Dabbāgh, M. *Bilāduna filestīn*, Dār al-Shafaq (Kufur Qar' 1988), Vol.8, section 2, p.8.
- 40 The researcher visited this site during summer 2004; a few miles east of this town, the desert begins.
- 41 Ibn al-Murajjā, *Fadā'il*, p.148.
- 42 Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Vol.5, p.195.
- 43 Ibid., Vol.2, p.245.
- 44 Ibid., Vol.4, p.104.
- 45 Ibid., Vol.2, p.185.
- 46 Al-Tifashī, 'surour al-Nafs bi-Madarik al-Hawas al-Khams' cited in Al-'Amrī, A. *Masālik al-Absār fī Mamālik al-Amsār*, edited by D. Krāfūlskī, Al-Markaz al-Islamī Lil-Būhūth (Beirut 1986), p.123.
- 47 El-Awaisi, K. *Usage of Names*, pp.17-26.
- 48 Ibn Shadād. M. *Al-A'lāq al-Khatira*, p.240.
- 49 Al-'Amrī, A. *Masālik al-Absār fī Mamālik al-Amsār*, edited by D. Krāfūlskī, Al-Markaz al-Islamī Lil-Būhūth (Beirut 1986), p.209.
- 50 Ibid., p.124.
- 51 Al-Qalaqshandī, A. *Ṣubḥ al-'Ashā fī Sina'at al-Inshā*, edited by M. Shams al-Din, Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah (Beirut), Vol.4, p.106.
- 52 Al-'Asqalānī, A. *Lisan al-Mizan*, edited by A. Abd al-Mawjood & A. Mu'Awadh, Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah (Beirut 1996) 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Vol.1, pp.54-55.
- 53 Ibid, p.54.

- 54 Al-‘Asqalānī, A. *al-Isabah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥabah*, edited by: A. Al-Bajawī, Dar al-Jīl (Beirut 1992), Vol. 4, p.764.
- 55 Al-Tel, *Conquest*, p.67.
- 56 Al-Tel, *Conquest*.

