

## Mapping the Borders of Holiness: Islamic Jerusalem and Its Holy Land

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**Abstract:** In the seventh century, soon after his Prophethood, Muhammad started to refer to regions far beyond his reach. Qur'anic verses were making reference to a city of Bayt al-Maqdis and to the regions around it. The importance of these regions is embedded within Quranic terminologies. There has, however, been little study into the geographical extents of these regions and concepts or, even more generally, into the geographies of the Qur'an. The extent of the regions around al-Aqsa Mosque, namely the Holy Land or the land of Bayt al-Maqdis, and the Land of Barakah, have been mentioned by many scholars in the past. This paper will deal with these Muslim concepts and contrast them with the Christian and Jewish notions. This is together with drawing parallels with another Quranic concept of the Makkan Haram.

**Key Words:** Bayt al-Maqdis, Makkah, holy land, Land of Barakah, sacred space, boundaries, Christian, Jewish.

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### Introduction

The idea of the Holy Land was well established in earlier religions and preceded the seventh century Islam. The idea of perceived sacred spaces, was well in existence when Prophet Muhammad was

born. Amongst the Arabs, sacred spaces were centred around idols. Also, in Christianity many shrines were erected around relics and saints. Yet another dimension of sacred space was the interregional holy cities, whose sanctity was recognised over large geographic areas and became centres of pilgrimages (Munt 2014: 16-17). Makkah and its sanctuary were a vital part of earlier religions in the whole of Arabia, the same can be said for Jerusalem to both Christians and Jews across their geographical extents. Christians and Jews had established an idea of the Holy Land prior to Islam. Jerusalem and its Holy Land thus had a vital status across its geographical extents to both Christians and Jews. This was established for Bayt al-Maqdis, from the outset of Islam, which developed its status with the revelation of Quranic verses in both Makkah and Madinah. It was asserted that this areas Holiness preceded both Christianity and Judaism, thus laying claim to the inheritance of ancient prophets.

The same can be said for the Haram of Makkah, which Muslims reclaimed and accordingly become well established as a religious sacred sanctuary within Islam, separate from any political or administrative borders. Was this perhaps also the case for Bayt al-Maqdis (IslamicJerusalem) had the Prophet Muhammad reached it, would he have set religious boundaries for it? Or as in Makkah just confirmed what existed after its conquest. Could the prophet have passed on this information to his companions? Might it have been mentioned in the Qur'an – or had it been passed on orally for generations? Or did the Muslims just adopt the Christian or Jewish perception of the Holy Land. Are there certain restrictions within the region of IslamicJerusalem similar to that in Makkah, such as fighting or hunting or cutting trees? Could there have been a similar marked-out region for the Holy Land but with a different scope? This paper would focus on the holy and blessed regions around Bayt al-Maqdis and discuss their geographical extents and significance from early and subsequent Muslim sources, contrasting them with the Christian and Jewish perceptions of the Holy Land.

### **The Holy Land**

Besides the Makkan Haram, the Quran makes mention of two other regions that have been given status from the divine. These have been mentioned in the Quran in relation to Bayt al-Maqdis, which to Prophet Muhammad had been established as his first Qiblah,

which he would face during his prayers from the outset of his prophethood (al-Rabi 2009). Also, it is the abode of primordial ancestral prophets, housing the second mosque after the Ka'bah (al-Ratrout 2005). The Quran mentions stories of these prophets within these regions (El-Awaisi 2014). Exegetists of the Quran, have attempted to map out these regions, as well as geographers and other Muslim scholars, some of whom dedicated treatises to this topic or included it within their other works.

Unlike the Harams of Makkah and Madinah, these areas were not considered a Haram in early Muslim works, not until the Mamluk and Ottoman period. Many scholars contested the use of the term Haram for al-Aqsa Mosque or the areas around it, as it does not carry any of the restrictions that come with the concept of a Haram. Ibn Hisham al-Ansari (d.761AH/1360CE) and Ibn Taymiyah (d. 728AH/1328CE) who lived during these times write that only the ignorant would call this area a Haram or *Haram al-Maqdis* (Ibn Taymiyah, 1997, vol.27:117). Ibn Hisham states, "*what I have heard from the chief figures in the city the term, Haram al-Quds, forging lies against God, making something haram which was not ordained by God*" (Ibn Hisham 2010: 159-161, 136). Also, that the first Haram according to the consensus of the Muslims, is that of Makkah, the second according to the majority of scholars is that of Madinah. The third is at *Wajj*, near Taif, but is only the opinion of Imam al-Shafi who was under the delusion that the hadith concerning this is authentic. A Haram, is accordingly a place that God had made inviolable and restricted hunting and cutting trees within its boundaries and no other place besides these three does such restrictions apply. Thus, not a single Muslim scholar would accept any other area to be a Haram. Ibn Taymiyah adds that Bayt al-Maqdis is not a place that can be called a Haram nor the Tomb of Abraham or any other place on earth apart from the three already mentioned (Ibn Taymiyah 1997, vol.28:14-15).

Neither Quranic verses nor early accounts and traditions refer to it as a Haram, thus what could these regions be? Does this degrade the status of this region if it is not a Haram, as argued by some orientalist (Matthews, 1936). There are no other precedents of this in Arabia, i.e. an area sanctified but not being a Haram. The

concept here seems considerably different. Although we have a central point of holiness or blessedness, but much of the implications are quite different from what was already established in Arabia. The distinctiveness of this Holy Land is that it is not a site nor a place nor a city but rather a large area, which is in whole holy. In Arabia, a Haram belonged to a certain group of people with a common belief; here different sites within this region are holy to followers of various religions, thus inducing complexity in the idea of shared space. This area was already revered by both Christians and Jews, and even before them, the Canaanites, as recorded in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The Quran although overlaps with some of their beliefs, presents a distinct perspective on these regions, and does not concur with the idea of the Biblical Promised Land. Thus, the dimension and boundaries of the extent of this land is a contested issue between the followers of the three main faiths in this land.

### *The Pre-Muslim Holy Land*

The Biblical idea of the Promised Land to the Jews extends in terms of territory, at its maximum extent, from the Euphrates to the Nile (or Al-'Arish), as promised by God to Abraham and his offspring. The Bible relates, "*On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates'"* (Genesis 15:18). After Moses led out the Israelites from Egypt, in the Exodus, the occupation of the Land of Canaan, was interpreted as the fulfilment of this promise (Numbers 34:1-12; Deuteronomy 1:8). The Land of Canaan thus became the extent of this Promised Land, including everything "*from Dan to Beersheba*" (Judges 20:1; 2 Samuel 3:10, 17:11, 24:2). Delineating the northern and southern boundary marks of this area but without an exact boundary line. The boundary of the Promised Land however is somewhat contradictory within the Bible, the extent is constantly changing in the different verses. The first definition had never come under the full control of the descendants of Isaac and Jacob but has come under the control of the descendant of Ishmael, which in the Jewish tradition the promise was never extended to. Moreover, within this region some restrictions and religious rules exist within Judaism; that its land cannot be sold permanently (Leviticus 25:23),

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<sup>1</sup> The story of Melchizedek worshiping at the site of al-Aqsa Mosque.

as well as the prohibiting of agricultural work every seventh year (Leviticus 25:3-7). Also, explicit reference to not defiling or shedding blood in this land as it is the land of God (Numbers 35:33-34). This is somewhat resonating the idea of restrictions in the Makkan Haram and keeping the land away from any profanity, but not to the same degree.

To the Christians on the other hand, the idea of the Holy Land or *Terra Sancta*, is directly connected with the life of Jesus Christ. Although accepting the Old Testaments promise of this land to the descendant of Abraham, now this was transferred to the Christians who accepted and acknowledged Jesus Christ, consequently excluding those who reject him. Jesus came to fulfil the law and Old Covenant, though extending the idea of the Chosen People beyond a racial group. Although the ideas preached by Jesus transcends space, and what he was striving to establish was more in the spiritual realm, away from the ridged Jewish jurisprudence on space, later Christians would come on pilgrimages to the places where Jesus walked. The idea of the Holy was now linked to Jesus and the location of his birth, journeys, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection; it is sometimes extended to his disciples. This not ignoring the backdrop of the Old Testament now inherited by the New People of God, i.e. the Christian; thus, many of Old Testament location are within the Christian Holy Land. The extent of this area was recorded in maps, the earliest being Jerome's map (map 1), from the fourth century (known from twelfth century recensions), the Madaba mosaic map (map 2), from the sixth century (still surviving in Transjordan today), and a map from the eighth century drawn in Paul Orosius' Histories.

These maps focus mainly on the area of Palestine between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea but also extended to Egypt and its Nile. Jerome also delineates the boundaries of the Promised Land of Moses based on chapter 34 from the Book of Numbers, giving details of its extent. Moreover, the maps are purely Christian in their depiction of holy sites and places in the Holy Land based on the Christian understanding of inheriting the Jews. Christian Jerusalem is depicted as a central point in these maps. It is important to note, that ideas of restrictions do not exist in the Christian vision of the Holy Land, and is rather more inclusive than the Jewish one.

### *The Muslim Holy Land*

Muslims saw themselves as the heirs of earlier religions, and Islam as the final manifestation of the divine word to humanity. Like the Christians saw themselves the inheritors of Judaism and the seed of Abraham. Islam's claim to this land is thus directly connected with biblical and primordial prophets. Association with this land is dated to the establishment of the first mosque, the Ka'bah, and it is narrated by Prophet Muhammad that the al-Aqsa Mosque was established merely forty years later (Al-Bukhârî 1998: 659; Muslim 2000, v.1: 209-10). Thus, the significance of this mosque and the surrounding region is an ancient one, predating even Prophet Abraham.

The area of Bayt al-Maqdis is referred to in numerous verse in the Quran with al-Aqsa Mosque being its centre of *Qadasah* (holiness) and *Barakah* (blessing). The Quranic verses talk of two entities, the Holy Land and the Land of Barakah; these verses are as follows:

O my people enter **the Holy Land** (*al-Ard al-Muqaddasah*)... (Quran 5:21)

Glory to Whom took His worshipper on a journey by night from *al-Masjid al-Harâm* to *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* whose surrounding We blessed with **Barakah**... (Quran 17:1)

And to Solomon We gave the fiercely blowing wind, speeding to his command to the **land which We have given Barakah** ... (Quran 21:81)

And We saved him [Abraham] and Lot to the **land which We have given Barakah** for all beings (Quran 21:71)

And We granted inheritance to the people who were persecuted, the East and West of the **land which We have given Barakah** ... (Quran 7:137)

And We made between them and **the towns** which We placed **Barakah**, towns in prominent positions, and had appointed stages of journey in due proportion... (Quran 34:18)

There are many other verses that discuss different aspects of this land related to stories of prophets or major incidents in the region (El-Awaisi 2014), but our focus on the geographical extents of these two regions. The first of the verses, mentioned above, talks of a land

being holy and this although refereeing to Prophet Moses and the Israelites, implies it holiness preceded them.

The idea of Holiness or *Qadasah* in the Arabic language stems from the trilateral root Q-D-S, conveying the meaning of purity (or purified, *Mutahar*) and blessing (*Mubarak*), thus being far removed from impurity and is at a degree of perfection through the *Barakah* it possesses. The level of purity defined by words of the root Q-D-S and the level of blessing from the root B-R-K are quite extraordinary. The Quran exemplifies numerous instances of words derived from these roots. Words from the root Q-D-S are mentioned in the Qur'an ten times, through five terms: *al-Qudûs* (The Holy One), *RûH al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit), *nuqadisu lak* (Glorify and Purify), *al-Wâdî al-Muqadas* (the Holy Valley) and *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* (the Holy Land). Each of these terms comes in a different context and can lead to a better understanding of the terminology *al-Ard al-Muqadasah*.

*Al-Qudûs* — a name that appears twice in the Qur'an 59:23; 62:1 — as an epithet of God, and is regarded as one of God's ninety-nine beautiful names. *Qudûs* here means the *Mubârak* (blessed).<sup>2</sup> Also, it comes to mean 'the perfect who is free from all defects'.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it can be said in English that *al-Qudûs* means the Holy One. *Rûh al-Qudus*, or "holy spirit" appears four times in the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:87, 253; 5:110; 16:102) and was used to address the Archangel Gabriel.<sup>4</sup> He was also given other names in the Qur'an: "the Faithful Spirit", "Our Spirit" and "The Spirit" [Qur'an 26:193; 19:17; 66:12; 70:4 78:38; 97:4]. Ibn Manẓûr adds in his linguistic dictionary that this is because Gabriel was created from purity (Ibn Manẓûr 1999, v.11: 61; al-Zubaydî 1994, v.8: 407). The name consists of two words "*RûH*" spirit and "*al-Qudus*" the Holy. *Al-Qudus* is the same as *al-Qudûs* and refers to God (al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.1: 450; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.1(2):25; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.1:122); therefore, it can be translated as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of the Holy, the Holy here being God.<sup>5</sup> *Al-Wâdî al-Muqadas*, refers to a geographical location known

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.12: 52, 88; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.4: 292; al-Zubaydî 1994, v.8: 408.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.12: 88; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.9(2): 41; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.4: 308; Ibn Manẓûr 1999, v.11: 60; al-Zubaydî 1994, v.8: 408

<sup>4</sup> Al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.1: 448, 449; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.1(2): 25; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.1: 121, 122; Ibn Manẓûr 1999, v.11: 61; al-Zubaydî 1994, v.8: 407

<sup>5</sup> This does not refer to a physical connection between the spirit and God.

as the Holy Valley (Qur'an 20:12; 79:16) in Sinai. The exegetists take the word *Muqadas* (Holy) to mean either *muṭahar* (purified) or *Mubâarak* (blessed) and or both. This is the place where Moses first encountered the Divine and was given the task of prophethood (El-Awaisi 2007).

The term *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* is mentioned only once in the Qur'an (5:21) and it refers to an area that has special characteristics and carries great importance. The use of the words from the same root give us a better understanding of the terminology *al-Ard al-Muqadasah*. Focusing on the concepts of purification and blessings. Some exegetists have limited the understanding to one meaning of the two. Some have taken it to mean pure and is purified.<sup>6</sup> This is explained by saying it has been purified of *shirk* (polytheism) and was made the dwelling place of prophets and believers (Ibn al-Jawzî 1987, v.2:323; al-Barûsî 1985, v.2: 375-6). Others explain that it is purified from *afaat* (ailments; epidemics) (al-Râzî 1990, v.6(11): 156; al-Naysabûrî 1996, v.2:574), and reject its being always purified from *shirk* and inhabited always by prophets or believers. Others add that the purification, lies in the fact that the Holy Land houses a place where people are cleansed from their sins (Abû Hayân 2001, v.3:469; al-Alûsî 1994, v.3(6):277) i.e. al-Aqsa Mosque. Some take the meaning of holiness to be blessing from God (Ibn 'Aṭiyah 2001, v.2:174, Ibn al-Jawzî 1987, v.2:323; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.3:83). Al-Ṭabari amongst others argue it is both purified and blessed (al-Ṭabari 1999, v.4:513; al-Biqâ'î 1995, v.2:425; Ibn 'Âshûr, nd:5/21). As linguistically everything that is *Muqadas* is also *Mubâarak* (Ibn Manzûr 1999, v.11:61; al-Zubaydî 1994, v.8: 409; El-Awaisi 2007).

As for the term *al-Ard al-Mubarakah* or the exact Quranic terminology *al-Ard al-latî Bâraknâ fiha* (the Land of Barakah)<sup>7</sup>, comes in the Quran five times, as detailed above. The root of the word *Barakah* comes in thirty-two verses in many forms (*tabâraka*, *Mubâarak*, *Mubâarakah*, *baraknâ*, *barakatûh*, *barakât*, and *bourika*). Its meaning can be approximately translated as divine blessing or grace, but it carries many other meanings that have a sense of continuity such as growth, expansion, abundance, upsurge of goodness, prosperity

<sup>6</sup> Al-Mâwardî nd:5/21; al-Ṭabrisî nd:5/21; Ibn al-Jawzî 1987, v.2:323; Abû Hayân 2001; al-Tha'alibî nd:5/21; al-Shawkânî 2000:456

<sup>7</sup> Literally: the Land in which We have placed Barakah (blessing).



and staying put. Linguists link it to meaning of “settling”, thus *birkah*, is a pool where water settles; also the kneeling down of a camel is “*barak*”, thus being firmly in place (al-Fayrûzabâdî 1991: v.3, 426-427; al-Zubaydî 1994: v.13, 514-515; Ibn Manzûr 1999: v.1 386-387). It is also argued that Barakah is the divine goodness placed in a thing and, though this is invisible, its effects are detectable (El-Awaisi, 2005:28). Barakah in the Qur’an comes in two main contexts, the first is the Barakah of God and always comes in the specific terminology of *Tabâraka*, and the second is the Barakah God bestows to His various creations. Not much is known about the first context, although it is mentioned in ten places in the Qur’an; the what and the how are unknown. But it is argued that one of the meanings of the word *Tabâraka* is “to be exalted”, and not growth or expansion, because God has no need of this, rather He is the one who grants all *Barakah* (al-Judaî, 2000: 29-30). Thus in this instance it is the fact that Allah is everlasting, full of good, magnificent, and everything that has Barakah is from His granting and grace (al-Judaî, 2000: 36). In contrast, the second type of Barakah is of immense importance as it refers to visible entities, geographical areas amongst them. This context can be divided into five categories: the Barakah God bestows on a being; object; ‘point in time’; text or statement; and place (El-Awaisi, 2007).

Barakah bestowed on certain **beings**, mainly prophets, lies in the fact that their names are *everlasting* as well as in the continuation of their message, and also in the *importance* they carried during their life-time and after their death. As for **objects**: these are mainly to do with material benefits that can be felt, such as the *crucial importance* of water which the Quran makes mention that it is *Mubarak* (Qur’an 50:9), being the cause of *growth and expansion*. As for the category of **texts** or **statements**: the Qur’an, is an example, *remaining unchanged* and *everlasting*. As for **time**: a period such as the Night of al-*Qadr* (Qur’an 44:3) is given a measurable magnitude of Barakah; the Quran states that this single night is equivalents to more than one thousand months (Qur’an 97:3) or thirty thousand days. The last category, **places** or locations, the Quran established that there is a general Barakah for the whole of the earth that is manifested in a *Physical Goodness* that exists in all parts of the world (Qur’an 41:10). Moreover, within the earth there are certain sites that have an in-

creased intensity or a different dimension of Barakah, mainly spiritual but also physical. The understanding of the intensity of Barakah can be better described in horizontal and vertical dimensions. It becomes clear that the whole earth has some minimal level of Barakah, while specific sites have a more extensive density or a higher intensity of Barakah. Clearly a theme runs through most of the Barakah verses illustrating that Barakah has many important denotations. Examples given may be seemingly be quite ordinary; the Barakah bestowed by the Divine turns them into something extraordinary with incredible characteristics. It could be argued, all examples of Barakah cannot be quantified, as they are taken to a spiritual realm. However, exegetists argue the physical manifestation elucidated in the idea of a site or land relatively small in size possessing remarkable diversity in its attributes is a clear manifestation of this Barakah.

Five verses refer to the Land of Barakah, which the majority of exegetists divided its Barakah into two main categories; spiritual/religious and material/worldly. The spiritual or religious Barakah is represented as being the Land where most prophets dwelt and spread their messages. As for the material or worldly Barakah, this is in its fertile grounds and its numerous varieties of fruits and plants, as well as its water, which gives both rich and poor a decent life.<sup>8</sup> Ibn 'Aṭīyah argues that it is in two categories, one in "this life" and the other for "the hereafter". The one in "this life" is what others have called the material or worldly Barakah, which he says is in the land which is the best over all others in the world: it has the tastiest water and abundant fruits and graces (Ibn 'Aṭīyah, 2001, v.4:89). Further to this, Barakah is not restricted to believers, but is, as verse (Quran 21:71) explains, is for all nations, believers and disbelievers (al-Jazâ'irî 1998, v.3:427). And the Barakah existed well before most of the prophets dwelled in that land. Most of the prophets in this land certainly came after Abraham, and mostly are his descendants. The same verse states that Abraham and Lot were

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ṭabarî (1999, v.8:17); al-Samarqandî (1997, v.2:300); al-Mâwardî (nd: 21/81); al-Zamakhsharî (1995, v.2:623); Ibn al-Jawzî (1987, v.5:5); al-Râzî (1990, v.10:117); al-Qurṭubî (1994, v.5(9):193); al-Baydâwî (nd: 17/1); al-Nasafî (1996, v.2:443); al-Naysabûrî (1996, v.4:323); Abû Hayân (2001, v.6:7); al-Biqâ'î (1995, v.4:329); al-Alûsî (1994, v.8(15):14); al-ZuHaylî (2003, v.8:11); Quṭb (1996, v.4:2212); see also El-Awaisi (2005:28)

saved to the land which has been blessed for all nations. Therefore, the Barakah precedes Prophet Abraham and not because of his dwelling or other prophets in it. It is thus argued that the Barakah was bestowed long before, and may have originated from the time al-Aqsa Mosque was established forty years after the Ka'bah (El-Awaisi 2007). Making it the source of Barakah for the surrounding region. It is said that the subsequent manifestation of this Barakah is the dwelling of prophets attracted to the barakah of this land.

The worldly or material Barakah argued by exegetists is manifested in its possession of remarkable diverse topographical features with diverse climates. Various agricultural produce of plants, fruits and vegetation are thus possible within this land. One example is the area of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the lowest area on earth, its hot climate allows the growth of tropical fruits while only thirty kilometres away the mountainous region around Jerusalem would be covered in snow in the winter, providing different agricultural produce across the year. It is not limited to this but concerns much more, such as its strategic geopolitical location (El-Awaisi, 2005: 28); as a natural bridge between continents by both land and sea. Historically the only way to travel between the ancient river civilisation of Mesopotamia and Egypt was through this land. Being the land bridge that connects Asia with Africa. Later with sea voyages, it connected another continent, namely Europe. This was not restricted to culture or trade but also became a major military route, which conquering armies would pass back and forth between these continents. Thus, this small strip of land witnessed the fall and rise of countless civilisations.

#### *Location and Extent of the Land of Barakah and the Holy Land*

The Quran clearly mentions two separate entities, the Holy Land and the Land of Barakah. Although these regions although might share certain areas, they are quite clearly two distinct entities. Many scholars have confused about these regions and have considered them to be one, this is evident in works of later Muslim scholars. However early Muslim exegetists and geographers have demarcated the extent of both regions separately as is clear from the Quranic context.

### *The Land of Barakah*

The extent of the Land of Barakah, is generally equated by most exegetists with the area of al-Sham (Historical Syria), with some including parts of Egypt to it. But there are no detailed demarcations of the boundaries of this land. Moreover, the Quranic verses on this issue are quite revealing, setting a centre and incorporating certain areas within this land as well as excluding other.

The centre of this land is declared as al-Aqsa Mosque, which the Quran mentions in relation to Prophet Muhammad nocturnal journey from the Ka'bah to "*al-Masjid al-Aqsa whose surrounding We blessed with Barakah (al-ladhî baraknâ Hawlah)*" (Qur'an 17:1). The verse does not specify the span of the Barakah to the surrounding area, as it does not give any territorial extent. Nevertheless, the verse makes a crucial point; it specifies al-Aqsa Mosque as the centre or nucleus of the surrounding area which is *Mubâarak*. Some exegetists have mentioned that the extent of this Barakah covers the area of al-Sham (historical Syria).<sup>9</sup> The modern exegetist, Sayyid Quṭb, makes an outstanding remark, that the Quran does not mention that al-Aqsa possess Barakah, as it does with the Ka'bah, but states that its environs are blessed with Barakah. Thus, the immense intensity of the Barakah of the mosques overflows to cover regions around it (Quṭb 1996).

It may be argued that this Barakah radiates to the entire world, but the other four verses limit and narrow its extent to a particular region. In the context of the migration of prophets Abraham and Lot, the Quran mentions that they were taken to this land; "*And We saved him (Abraham) and Lot to the land which We have given Barakah (al-Ard al-latî baraknâ fihâ) for all beings*" (Qur'an 21:71). This clearly makes mention of the Land of Barakah, excluding the area they came from, generally accepted by exegetists as Babylon in Iraq (al-Tabarî 1999, v.9:45; Ibn 'Aṭiyah 2001, v.4:90; Abû Hayân 2001). The destination most exegetists agree to be al-Sham (historical Syria), within the area between the Euphrates and al-'Arish as

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Samarqandî 1997, v.2:300; al-Mâwardî nd. 17/1; Ibn 'Aṭiyah 2001, v.3:436; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.5(10):192; Abû Hayân 2001, v.6:7

argued by al-Tabari (1999, v.9:46).<sup>10</sup> Prophet Abraham lived in several cities of the region of Bayt al-Maqdis,<sup>11</sup> but finally settled and buried his wife in Hebron and was himself later buried there too (Ibn Taymiyah 1997, v.27:235). Prophet Lot also settled within the region of Bayt al-Maqdis, in the area south of the Dead Sea, as he was sent to its people. This drove some scholars to narrow down the Land of Barakah to be just the region of Bayt al-Maqdis or *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* (The Holy Land), as it is the area where these two prophets settled and not the whole of al-Sham.<sup>12</sup>

Another verse talks of the land, which the Israelites inherited, after being persecuted in Egypt. It is believed that this was after they had moved out from Egypt to within the region of historical Syria. The verse states; “*And We granted inheritance to the people who were persecuted, the East and West of the land which We have given Barakah (al-Ard...al-lati barakna fiha)*” (Qur’an 7:137). The exegetists are in much disagreement about what land the Israelites inherited; the majority believe it to be al-Sham.<sup>13</sup> While others include both al-Sham and Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Some exegetists narrow this land down to even a smaller area; they take it to be the Holy Land within al-Sham (al-Samarqandî 1997, v.1:559). This could most likely be parts

<sup>10</sup> Some exegetists give other locations, south to Makkah and west to Egypt. Al-Ṭabarî, after mentioning the different opinions, supports the strongest of these, i.e. that the destination was within al-Sham, and asserts that there is a consensus amongst scholars on this matter. He refutes the other arguments on the grounds that although Abraham visited Makkah many times, these were short visits rather than his settling there or staying for long periods. Thus neither Abraham nor Lot made Makkah their home, but settled in the area of al-Sham (al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.9:46). The same can also be said for Egypt; Abraham did not take Lot to Egypt – the accounts only state that Abraham accompanied his first wife on his visit there. From Muslim core sources it is evident that Abraham made Makkah the home of his second wife and first son, who settled there; he himself did not reside there for long (Qur’an 14:37).

<sup>11</sup> Such as al-Saba’ and Hebron (al-Bagawî 2002, v.4:35; Abû Hayân 2001, v.6:305; al-Alûsî 1994, v.9(17):68; al-Marâghî nd, 6:53).

<sup>12</sup> Al-Samarqandî (1997, v.2:432); al-Mâwardî (nd:21/71); al-Ṭabrasî (2005: 21/71); Ibn ‘Abd al-Salâm (2000:339); al-Qurṭubî 1998, (v.6:212); Ibn Kathîr (1997, v.3:165); al-Biqâ’î (1995, v.5:97); al-Suyûtî (2000, v.4:581); al-Shawkânî (2000:1139).

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.6:43-4; Ibn ‘Aṭiyah 2001, v.2:446; al-Baydâwî nd: 7/137; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.2:213; al-Tha’âlibî nd: 7/137; al-Biqâ’î 1995, v.3:92.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Zamakhsharî 1995, v.2143; al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.4:245; al-Nasafî 1996, v.2:107; Abû Hayân 2001, v.4:375

of al-Sham the Israelites inhabited after the Exodus. It is known historically that the Israelites after the Exodus were asked to enter the Holy Land, but when they rejected this command they were destined to the wilderness for forty years (Qur'an 5:26). They did not return to Egypt, nor did their offspring who were only able to conquer parts of the Holy Land after the forty years' ban had passed; later, at the time of the Prophet Solomon, they spread out into other areas. Therefore, the mubarak promised land mentioned in the verse which is within the area of al-Sham and not Egypt. Thus, Egypt, the area they came from, would certainly be outside the Land of Barakah.

The remaining two verses relate to Prophet Solomon and subsequent periods. In relation to Prophet Solomon, it relates to his travels back and forth to this land. The verse states; "*and to Solomon We gave the fiercely blowing wind, speeding to his command to the land which We have given Barakah (al-Ard al-latî baraknâ fihâ)*" (Qur'an 21:81). The verse tells of Prophet Solomon travelling using the wind, from various parts of the earth – which are not specified – to another specified part which is the Land of Barakah. However, what can be understood from this verse is that Prophet King Solomon is travelling to a specific area on this earth that is *Mubâarak*. In Muslim sources it is believed that the base of Prophet Solomon's Kingdom was within al-Sham. Exegetists mostly agree that the land specified in the verse is the area of al-Sham or within it.<sup>15</sup> The Quran mentions the distance of the travelling; by stating that it covers the journey of one month by road but is travelled in one morning or an afternoon by Solomon using the wind (Qur'an 34:12). Exegetists argue his base was the city of Bay al-Maqdis (Ibn Kathîr 1997b, v.1(2):19-22; Abû Hayân 2001, v.6:309), while others state it was the city of *Ba'labak* (al-Ṭabrisî nd: 21/81) or the ancient city of *Tadmur* (Ibn Kathîr 1997b, v.1(2):22; Iṭfish nd: 21/81). In an authentic hadith it inclines to the first opinion as his main centre. The final verse related to an ancient journey on the route from Saba' in Yemen all the way up to al-Sham, along which people used to travel. "*And We*

<sup>15</sup> Al-Ṭabarî (1999, v.9:54); al-Mâwardî (nd: 21/81); al-Baghawî (2002, v.4:38); Ibn 'Atiyah (2001, v.4:93); Ibn al-Jawzî (1987, v.5:374); al-Râzî (1990, v.11(22):174); al-Qurṭubî (1998, v.6:228); al-Naysabûrî (1996, v.5:39); Abû Hayân (2001, v.6:309); Ibn Kathîr (1997, v.3:167); Quṭb (1996, v.4:2391).

made between them and **the towns** which We placed **Barakah** (al-Qurâ al-latî **baraknâ fihâ**), towns in prominent positions, and had appointed stages of journey in due proportion" (Qur'an 34:18). The verse divides the route into three categories; the land of the departure, the towns on the route (resting stations) and the land of destination. It is quite clear that the verse is referring to Yemen as the starting point. To be specific. However, the verse explicitly refers to the towns at the end of the route to be *Mubâarak*. It is not however clear where these towns, which are *Mubâarak* start and finish, since the verse does not specify this. Exegetists unanimously agree that these blessed towns are within al-Sham. Al-Ṭabarî cites two arguments that suggest that the blessed villages refer to the whole of al-Sham, which he adopts, as do other exegetists.<sup>16</sup> Al-Qurṭubî states that the blessed towns number 4700 (al-Qurṭubî 1998, v.7:260). However, the other argument is that these towns are of Bayt al-Maqdis and the Holy Land (al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.10:366; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.3:466).

From the discussion of the above verse, a map of this region starts to come into shape. The connotation with the region of al-Sham is evidently understandable, as it helps map out what they would be referring to. Since it is the closest geographical approximation of this land. The region of al-Sham had been mapped put by Muslim geographer, such as Ibn Hawqal, al-Istakhri and al-Maqdisi. They have produced maps of the extent of the region, generally extending from the Euphrates to the Sinai Peninsula (map 3). There are clear overlays between al-Sham and the Land of Barakah, but it is only mentioned as an approximation. The Quranic specified centre together with the understanding of the term *hawlahu*, together with the exclusion of places is quite revealing of the extent of this land. This leads to a new theory, *the Barakah Circle theory*, which specifies a number of circles around the al-Aqsa Mosque. The closer one is to the centre the higher the intensity of the Barakah (El-Awaisi 2005).

The mixing between the boundaries of al-Sham and the Land of Barakah may be attributed to a number of reasons; it being the closest approximation. But also, the mixing of the traditions on the

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.10:366; al-Zamakhsharî 1995, v.3:560; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.3:466; al-Râzî 1990, v.13(25):218

excellence of al-Sham with those of the Land of Barakah and presuming them to be the same entity. Another reason is measuring the known with what is *Mubâarak*; many of the exegetists explained the Barakah in its physical manifestation, thus requiring the existence of a fertile ground, trees and plenty of water. Since this fitted perfectly and applied to al-Sham they restricted it to al-Sham rather than investigating its reaching the deserts and Egypt. Some exegetists excluded Egypt for this very reason (Ibn 'Aṭiyah 2001, v.2:446; al-Râzî 1990, v.7(14):181; al-Naysabûrî 1996, v.3:309). This meant neglecting the understanding of *Hawlah*, and restricting it to the areas that fitted the criteria; thus, they were talking about the fertile areas across the left side of the Fertile Crescent. However, this clearly contradicts the framework of Barakah, in that not all forms of Barakah are visible. However, the Quran refers to the area God spoke to Moses in Sinai as *Mubâarak*, although it may be considered barren land. Thus, it may be said that the Land of Barakah is a large region, with its centre al-Aqsa mosque, extending to cover an area of a radius of four hundred kilometres, encompassing most of al-Sham as well as the Sinai Peninsula and parts of Egypt and northern Arabia (El-Awaisi 2007: 49-50).

### *The Extent of the Holy Land and Bayt al-Maqdis*

The Quranic verse that established the name the Holy Land is in relation to Prophet Moses's command to the Israelites to enter this land from within the Sinai Peninsula, an integral part of the Land of Barakah. He commands them saying "*O my people enter the Holy Land (al-Ard al-Muqaddasah)*" (Qur'an 5:21). It is clear that he is not asking them to enter a city but rather a region. Since the term used in Arabic is *al-Ard* meaning "land", he is talking about an area that would include many cities, towns and villages.

Exegetists present many confusing arguments on the extent of the Holy Land. They present six main arguments all within the area of al-Sham or historical Syria.<sup>17</sup> Exegetists who give their own opinions mainly favour that the Holy Land as being the land of Bayt al-

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<sup>17</sup> These are: Al-Tur and the area around it; Al-Sham (Historical Syria); Damascus Palestine and parts of Jordan; Jericho; the land of Bayt al-Maqdis; both Aelia and Bayt al-Maqdis.



Maqdis. Al-Tabarî's own opinion on this controversy after presenting the different arguments concludes by saying, "*Its name is the Holy Land as was stated by Prophet Moses, and to say it is this part and not this has no evidence; but what we can be sure of is that it is within the area which extends from the Euphrates and al-'Arish of Egypt*" (al-Tabarî 1999, v.4:513). The most compelling argument from the exegetists is that the Holy Land is the within al-Sham, and particularly the land of Bayt al-Maqdis. From early Muslim history some Muslim geographers have given identical dimensions for the extent of the Holy Land or the land of Bayt al-Maqdis. It was seen that the Holy Land was within the Land of Barakah as argued by Ibn Kathir in relation to the migration of Abraham and Lot, he states; Abraham migrated to al-Sham, and specifically to the Holy Land *within it* (Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.3:165). This was evident as well in quotes from Abû 'Abd al-Malik al-Jazarî and also Zuhair Ibn Muhammad who state that *al-Sham* is Mubârak (blessed), while *Filistîn* (Palestine) is Holy.<sup>18</sup> In a letter from Muhammad Ibn Tughj to one of the Roman (Byzantine) rulers telling him of the realm of the Muslims he writes: "*Also the Jund of Palestine which is the Holy Land, that houses al-Aqsa Mosque... the Mosque and tomb of Abraham... the birth place of the Messiah [Jesus]*" (al-Qalqashandî 1987, v.7:13). This understanding has survived, although some have confused the understanding of the Land of Barakah with the Holy Land. In more recent times, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a popular belief amongst ordinary people that the Holy Land (*al-Ard al-Muqadasah* or *Ard al-Maqdis*) was only a small part of historical Syria, namely its southern part (Ridâ 1999, v.6 269; al-Marâghî nd, v.2(6): 90), meaning it to be Palestine before its colonial boundaries.

Some scholars have presented more exact dimensions for the extent of this land. They use the terms *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* and or the land of Bayt al-Maqdis. It is important to note that both names come from the same root of Holiness, and the name Bayt al-Maqdis was used in three different connotations from the early Muslim period; the mosque, city and region (El-Awaisi 2007). There are hundreds of narrations that refer to a region named Bayt al-Maqdis,

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-Murajjâ 1985:234; Ibn 'Asâkîr 1995, v.1: 140, 145; al-Kanji 1985:289-290; al-Hindî 1981, v.12:303-304.

sometimes referring to a particular site within it or one of its boundary lines. For example, an authentic prophetic tradition is taken to refer to the ancient city of Jericho, but using the term Bayt al-Maqdis; “*the Sun was not held for any human except Yousha’ (Joshua) when he was marching towards Bayt al-Maqdis*” (Ibn Hanbal 1995, v.8: 275). The Prophet uses 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 books of exegesis, where Jericho is taken to be part of Bayt al-Maqdis and its eastern gate. One of the major early exegetist, al-Sadî, clearly states that Jericho is part of the land of Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Ṭabarî 1999, v.4:513-4; Ibn al-Jawzî 1987, v.2:323; Ibn Kathîr 1997, v.2:36). Other sites include; Bethlehem, Hebron, Karak, Ascalon, Lud, Nablus, among tens of other town and villages (El-Awaisi 2007: 229-239). Another early narration following the Muslim conquest of the region, comes from the Muslim commander in chief, Abû ‘Ubaydah ‘Âmir Ibn al-JarâH, in the year 18AH/638CE. The narration talks of him falling sick in the area of *FaHl*, and, as he was on his deathbed, he asked to be buried west of the River Jordan in *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* (Holy Land) (al-Wâṣiṭî 1979; Ibn al-Murajja 1985:237; Ibn Tamîm al-Maqdisî 1994:300).<sup>19</sup>

Besides these accounts many scholars mention the southern boundaries of the region of Bayt al-Maqdis when discussing the extent of the wilderness of the Israelites. The first to mention this was Abû ‘Ubaydah (d. 209AH/ 824CE) who places parts of the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis* on the frontier with the wilderness; he states: “*And some of the boundaries of the wilderness are Bilâd Ard Bayt al-Maqdis*” (Abû ‘Ubaydah nd: 9). The same is said by the famous geographers al-Iṣṭakhrî, Ibn Hawqal, Al-Hamawî who mention the lands of Bayt al-Maqdis having a frontier with the region of *al-Tih* (al-Iṣṭakhrî 1927:53; Ibn Hawqal 1938:185; al-Hamawî nd, v.2:81). The terminologies used are of importance, denoting a wide region.

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<sup>19</sup> He later withdrew his request and asked to be buried in the site where he died, out of fear that it would become a custom. It is well known that Abû ‘Ubaydah was buried adjacent to the eastern side of the River Jordan west of Jarash, in a village called ‘Ithma (‘Amta) (al-Hanbalî 1999, v.1:385).

Many scholars gave a dimensional extent of this land, one of the first to do so was al-Maqdisi (d.380AH/ 1000CE), who gives a numerical dimension to the extent of this region. He states that this area extends "up to forty miles" from the centre (al-Maqdisî 1906: 173). Al-Bakrî (d.487AH/ 1094CE) in his geographical dictionary also gives a dimensional extent of the boundaries of the Holy Land; "*The Holy Land is forty Miles multiplied by the same*" (al-Bakrî 1992: v.1 466). Another account is from al-Tîfâshî (d.651AH/ 1251CE) who refers to the extent of the land of the Holy; he talks of the position of Bayt al-Maqdis within the Holy Land. He states; "*Bayt al-Maqdis lies in the centre of the Holy Land in which Allah has placed Barakah*" (cited in al-'Umarî 1986: 123). This reiterates that the city and or the al-Aqsa Mosque are the centre of the Holy Land. Al-Himyarî (d. 727AH/ 1327CE) gives just the dimensions of the extent of the Holy Land twice in his book, he states "*The Holy land is forty miles by the same*" (al-Himyarî, 1980: 66, 554).

Many others have mentioned references to this land, in passing, throughout the centuries. It is important to note some instead of giving the extent of the Holy Land, have muddled it with the concept of the Land of Barakah, and have given the extents of the latter. This mainly occurs with later scholars in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, such as al-Hanbali (d. 927AH/ 1521CE), who give a very detailed description of what he perceives to be the Holy Land but in actual fact is description of *al-Ard al-Mubarakah*. A latter scholar Al-Tumurtâshî (d. ~1127AH/ 1715CE), wrote a treatise determining the extent of the Holy Land, the land of Palestine and the lands of al-Sham. However, his work was a mere duplication of previous writing, quoting the same extent as that of al-Hanbalî (al-Tumurtâshî 1998:62). In late period of Muslim history, it is clear that the Land of Barakah, the land of al-Sham and the Holy Land were undistinguishable from one another. In contrast early works have evidently established these three regions as distinct entities, with some shared territories.

### **Boundaries**

The boundaries of the region of Bayt al-Maqdis or the Holy Land have been noted by a number of Muslim scholars. The renowned tenth century Arab geographer Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Maqdisi,

the Jerusalemite (d. d.380AH/ 1000CE) was one of many who referred to this holy region. Undeniably, he was one of the first to give a detailed description of the extent and boundaries of this region. In his masterpiece *Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim* (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions) he dedicates a substantial section of his book to this region. 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 (al-Maqdisî 1906: 173):

The limits of *al-Quds* extend to cover the area around *Aelia* up to forty *mîl* (miles). This includes *al-Qaşabah* and its towns and twelve *mîl* (miles) into *al-BaHr*, plus *Şuġhar*, *Ma'âb* and five *mîl* (miles) into *al-Badyah*. In the direction of *Qiblah* it extends to beyond *al-Kusayfa* and the land around it. In the Northern direction it reaches the *Tukhum* (limits) of Nablus. This Land is *Mubâarakah* 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.

The statement of al-Maqdisî can be divided into several parts. The first is relatively short; in it he gives the name of the region and the central point of reference. In the second he gives dimensions of the extent of this land. In the third he gives a detailed description of the area covered, naming certain sites and locations. And in the fourth he gives a topographical description of the land. The name he uses to refer to this region is *al-Quds*<sup>20</sup> or the Holy, and for the city he uses the outdated name *Aelia*. These two names were but a few used to refer to the whole area.

In the beginning of the account al-Maqdisî gives a numerical dimension to the extent of this region. He states that it is "*up to forty miles*". The mile here referring to the Arab mile and based on different measurements presented by al-Maqdisî it is the equivalent of **2126** metres. Thus, the forty miles would in actual fact refer to **85.04**

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<sup>20</sup> Al-Quds was the most popular name of the time for the city which is probably why it was used by al-Maqdisî, who also used it to refer to the city in numerous citations in his book.

km.<sup>21</sup> The extent of this is clear from his statement being equal to forty miles radius around Aelia, thus the centre is the city of Aelia and it extends from it. The following section where the named sites fall within the forty-mile radius confirms this understanding. From the wording used by al-Maqdisî it seems at first that he is talking about a circle; however, on reading through the first sentence carefully again, this understanding is changed. Al-Maqdisî used the word “*ilâ*” in Arabic which means “up to”, meaning that the maximum would be forty miles, but it could be much less. The radius therefore would fluctuate in the different directions. Thus, it no longer refers to a full uniform circle and, consequently, could mean an irregular shape.

The third part of al-Maqdisî's account, gives a detailed description of the areas covered. He starts off with the name Aelia as the centre; referring to the city. The second name mentioned is *al-Qaşabah* and its towns, reference here is to administrative capital of the province of Palestine at his time, al-Ramla in addition to its towns; such as Lud and Yâfâ (Jaffa). The following section refers to the Mediterranean Sea and includes twelve miles from it.<sup>22</sup> To the east and southeast, he mentions *Şughar* (Zoar), known today as *Ghor al-Şafi*, al-Maqdisî mentions it as the administrative capital of the province of *al-Sharâh*, (al-Maqdisî 1906: 155). The other town he mentions is Ma'âb which is not very far from Zoar; in fact, it is also administratively part of the province of al-Sharâh at his time (al-Maqdisî 1906: 155). He goes beyond Ma'âb to include a further five miles into the desert. To the south, or in the direction of the *Qiblah* (direction to Makkah), the boundary extends to the area beyond al-Kuseifa. It lies today thirty kilometres east of Beersheba. The interest here is in the site, as the last inhabited area in this direction, thus the boundary lines goes beyond it. Finally, to the north, the boundary is extended to the borders of Nablus. Reference here is to the northern limits of Nablus.

<sup>21</sup> For more discussion, on the Arab *Mîl* see (El-Awaisi 2007: 298-306). Classical geographers used different techniques in measuring long distances they tied measuring ropes in straight lines from one mountain-top to another (Dhâish nd:104; al-Fangry 2003) and also used the positioning of longitudes and latitudes. Since both techniques would have likely been used by al-Maqdisî, the error margin will be minimal.

<sup>22</sup> Why this region extends into the Sea? This needs further investigation.

Al-Maqdisî ends his account of the boundaries by commenting briefly on some of the features of this region. He says: “*This land is Mubârak (blessed) as Allah –may He be exalted– Has stated*” 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-Mubârah*”, he would have meant only this specific region. Therefore, the Land of Barakah extends far beyond those boundaries; this area is only a part of it. He also refers to the Barakah being bestowed<sup>1</sup> by God, in reference to the Barakah radiating around al-Aqsa (Qur’an 17:1). He then briefly discusses its topography and refers to the mountainous area and the plains which are well cultivated. This fits the description perfectly as this area can be divided into the chain of mountains in the middle and low plains on both sides (map 4).

From looking at the above map, it is clear that al-Maqdisi mentions the main cities in the region, however many of the major cities such as Gaza and Amman, which lie within the forty-mile radius, are missed out. It is interesting that he mentions both as part of the province (*jund*) of Palestine, connected to the capital al-Ramla. This is a clear indication that al-Maqdisi is differentiating between Palestine as an administrative province and the Holy Land as a spiritual or a religious region. He transcends administrative lines and includes areas from another administrative province, namely al-Sharah, and its cities Sughar and Moab. Therefore, it is clear we are talking about a boundary that transcends both time and politics.

Besides al-Maqdisi, Al-Bakrî (d.487AH/ 1094CE) and Al-Tîfâshî (d.651 AH/ 1251 CE) give dimensional extents of the land while Al-’Umarî (d.749 AH/1349 CE) and Al-Qalaqashandî (d.821AH/ 1418CE) give a descriptive extent of boundary of the Holy Land. Al-’Umarî makes an interesting connotation in the opening of his definition where he equates the region of *al-Quds al-Sharîf* with the *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* (Holy Land), taking them as

identical entities.<sup>23</sup> Later al-Qalaqashandî<sup>24</sup> only uses the term, the Holy Land. The description of the extent is quite similar; encompassing the city of Jerusalem and the area around it up to the River Jordan to the east, to the west it passes Ramla to the Mediterranean Sea. From the south, the towns directly south of the Dead Sea (al-'Umarî 1986: 208-209; al-Qalaqashandî nd, v.4: 106). From both texts it is clear, that they begin by giving a fixed central point and then two axes, in "length and breadth". Both again fail to mention the northern boundaries, but al-'Umarî makes mention of this in another section of his book, stating; "*the city of Nablus is regarded part of al-Ard al-Muqadasah, and lies within its boundaries*" (al-'Umarî 1986: 124). Thus, he includes it within the boundaries of the Holy Land.<sup>25</sup>

Following an extensive study of accessible Muslim sources and accounts, and a combination of all the evidence on the extent of the region, a detailed depiction that shows the extent of the boundaries of the Holy Land or Bayt al-Maqdis is possible. The map below shows these boundaries as taken from the dimensions, descriptions and physical topography given by various scholars across Muslim history.

Within the map lie major sites such as the walled city of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Kuseifa, Ramla, Lud, Jaffa, Nablus, Jericho, Ma'âb, Karak and Zoar. It would extend in the following

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<sup>23</sup> "*Al-Quds al-Sharîf; al-Ard al-Muqadasah* encompasses the *Madinat al-Quds* and the area around it up to the River Jordan which is named *al-Shari'ah*, up to Palestine which is named Ramla in width, and from *al-BaHr al-Shamî* to the cities of Lot in breadth. Most of this land is mountains and valleys, except what is on the sides.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Ard al-Muqadasah* includes Bayt al-Maqdis and what is around it, up to the River Jordan named *al-Shari'ah*, up to the city of Ramla 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>25</sup> Later accounts from the Mamluk and Ottoman period start to confuse the boundaries of the Holy Land with that of the Land of Barakah or giving the Biblical dimension of the Promised Land, an example of this is the modern exegetist Ibn 'Âshûr (d. 1393AH/ 1973CE), who discusses the extent of the Holy Land in biblical terms. A comparison with the land of Canaan and the land of Palestine is attempted; "*The Holy Land ... is here the land of Canaan from the Desert of Sîn to the entrance of Hammah and Hebron. This land is the land of Palestine...*" (Ibn 'Âshûr nd:5/21). It is very clear that he is trying to describe the Jewish Promised Land, in modern terms. Equating it with Palestine, a comparison not accurate neither in modern nor ancient terms.

directions as follows, to the **east**: the River Jordan, to the **north**: Jenin, to the **west**: 25km into the Mediterranean Sea, and to the **south**: Ghor al-Safi and the area parallel to it (El-Awaisi 2007: 275-276).

### Conclusion

The Holy Land which was already revered by Christians and Jews prior to Islam, became instantaneously part of the Islamic faith and creed. The link was taken back to ancient prophets and the construction of al-Aqsa Mosque forty years after the Ka'bah, with the first human; thus predating Christian and Jewish connection with this land. An authentic prophetic tradition mentions the establishment of the first two mosque in proximity of each other (Al-Bukhârî 1998:659; Muslim 2000, v.1: 209-10; Ibn Mâjah 2000: 111; al-Nasâ'î 2000, v.1: 112; Ibn Hajar 1997, v.6: 494).<sup>26</sup> The concept of Land of Barakah and its extent was introduced early in Makkah but in general terms. This was to be advanced and detailed in the formative period in Madinah, with the introduction of the term Holy Land.

The sanctuary of Makkah was reclaimed following the conquest of Makkah, in January 630, endorsing the canons and restrictions. The same cannot be said for the Holy Land, which although Prophet Muhammad did try to conquer during his life time, but only reached as far as Tabuk (October 630) on the borders of the Land of Barakah, while his companions reached as far as Mu'tah, within the Holy Land, few months before the conquest of Makkah, in September 629, and again only days after his death (June 632). Had the prophet reached this area, would he have recognised the Jewish restrictions on this land, remains a mystery. However, five years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims peacefully took over the Holy City and the region as a whole. This required the highest Muslim authority, the Caliph Umar, to be present. He did set certain restrictions on the destruction of churches and property (already Quranic principals), but without the authority of divine revelation new rules and regulation could not be

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<sup>26</sup> It is narrated that Abû Dhar asked the Prophet which mosque was first built on this earth. "He replied: *al-Masjid al-Harâm*; then he asked what was the second, he replied: *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*. He further asked how long was between them and the Prophet replied: forty years"



established Islamically. It may be said restrictions parallel to the Makkan Haram were not befitting for region that the Quran establishes its inclusivity for all beings (Quran 21:71). Therefore, early Muslim did not attempt to make it a Haram, rather the Quranic concepts of Barakah and Holiness are unique in this land, something neither Makkah nor Madinah possess, especially in terms of its material Barakah. Thus, while Makkah became exclusively Muslim, the Holy Land could not have, its Barakah is inclusive of all, Muslim, Christian, Jew and non. Accordingly, as much as Muhammad wished to be present in the Holy Land, his presence would not have changed the already established Quranic principals. Later Muslims attempted to attach the concept of Haram to both Jerusalem and Hebron, but were faced with staunch opposition from renowned Muslim scholars at the time, as this is only possible through divine revelation. Also, if the same rules of restrictions in Makkah were to be applied, this fertile land would become desolate, and this is in converse with the divine blessing bestowed on this land. This does not degrade the Holy Land in anyway, nor are Makkah and Madinah degraded by not being referred to as the Holy Land or Land of Barakah (in their Quranic use).

It can be observed that there were two regions around al-Aqsa Mosque. The Makkan prototype seems to have been replicated in Islamicjerusalem, with the al-Aqsa Mosque in the centre surrounded by two regions: the Holy Land and the Land of Barakah. The closer region to the centre has been depicted in great details. The Holy Land its boundaries and extent were also well established in early Muslim works and continued to be preserved for centuries. Again, like the regions in Makkah, the smaller region was better delineated than the wider region of the Land of Barakah. The extent of the Holy Land is equated by exegetists to the region of Bayt al-Maqdis, which shares the same root of holiness; with meanings of purity, sanctity and blessings. Scholars from different disciplines have engaged with some accept of its extent, mentioning a village or a city that is part of this region. Moreover, the delineation of the Jerusalemite scholars, al-Maqdisi, has encompassed these narrations within a very precise definition. He detailed both a dimensional extent of its boundaries which corresponds with the description of the areas included. Other scholars followed suit and detailed the geographical span of this area. In later centuries this

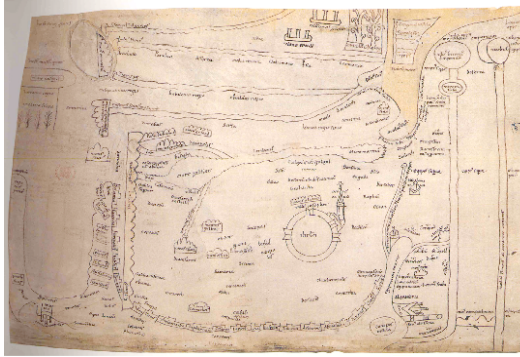
was confuse with the Land of Barakah or giving the Biblical dimension of the Promised Land, as is evident in some modern exegetical works. The Muslim frontiers of the Holy Land come in stark contrast with the Jewish and Christian Holy Lands, but might share elements with the wider Land of Barakah.

The second region, centred around al-Aqsa Mosque, is the wider region of the Land of Barakah. The original Qur'anic phrase "*al-Ard al-latî Baraknâ fihâ*" (the land which We placed Barakah therein), with its centre being blessed around gives a general sense of a broad region. Exegetists have equated with the closest geographical territory, that is the land of al-Sham, but has been shown to be not an exact delineation of its boundaries. It is an area that extends to include most of al-Sham (Historical Syria) together with Sinai, parts of Egypt and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. This is somewhat close to the Biblical understanding of the original promise to Abraham, fulfilled to the seed of Ishmael and not Isaac (Israel).

Failure to understand the differences between Land of Barakah and the Holy Land as two separate entities led to a mix-up of these terms, which in turn led to more confusions and misunderstanding in late periods of Muslim history. It must be noted that the whole of the Holy Land is part of the Land of Barakah but clearly not vice-versa. The Holy Land has an additional characteristic, something the Land of Barakah did not possess as a whole, and although they are two different entities they nevertheless share certain territories, mainly the closer circle around al-Aqsa Mosque. Consequently, the Holy Land shares the characteristics of the Land of Barakah in addition to having its own particular qualities and features. From a linguistic point of view the meaning of *Muqaddass* (holy) includes Barakah (blessing) as part of its meaning. Moreover, the meaning of *Mubâarak* does not carry any meaning of Holiness. Thus, *Muqaddass* is more confined while *Mubâarak* is extended to cover much more. Some early traditions, narrate that *al-Sham is Mubâarak and Palestine is Muqaddass* (Ibn 'Asâkir 1995, v.1:140,145; al-Hindî 1981, v.12:303-304), confirming the argument that in the early Muslim period this was much clearer.

Finally, similar concept between the sacred region of Makkah and that of the Holy Land (IslamicJerusalem) reflected a divine prototype in early Muslim understanding. The striking similarities, in

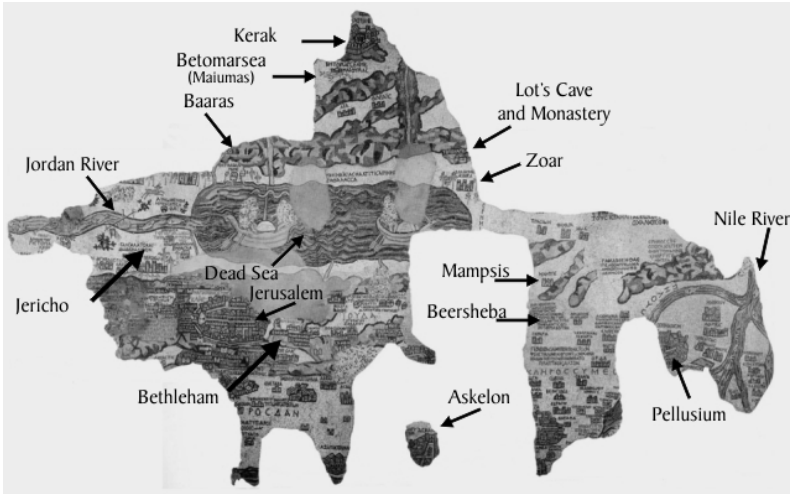
form, proportions, outline and even spatial extent, goes further to ascertain a form of divine or sacred twining between both monotheistic centres. This has been reflected in a narration attributed to ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Umar, the companion of the Prophet. Al-Fakihî, in his famous local history of Makkah “Akhbar Makkah”, while talking about the region of the Haram, narrates that Ibn ‘Umar to have said; “The Haram is sanctified to the same extent both in the skies and the earth. Similarly, Bayt al-Maqdis is holy to the same extent in the skies and the earth”. In another narration,<sup>27</sup> it details that the sanctification and holiness of both places is to the same extent in the seven heavens and seven earths (al-Fakihî 1998, v.2:271 & Ibn Tamîm al-Maqdisî 1994:221). This early narration bonds both locations together and identifies their divine origins. Thus, amplifying the divine sacredness of the Haram and the holiness of Bayt al-Maqdis (Holy Land) in a more pictorial way in the vertical dimension.<sup>28</sup> This emphasises the inviolability of the two centres and their regions as well as their divine origin. From these early understandings and the very close ties between the initial two revered regions in Islam, it can be concluded that the boundaries of the region of the Holy Land may be considered to be the equivalent of the sacred boundaries of the Harams of Makkah, but without the restrictions and limitations established within the Makkan precinct.



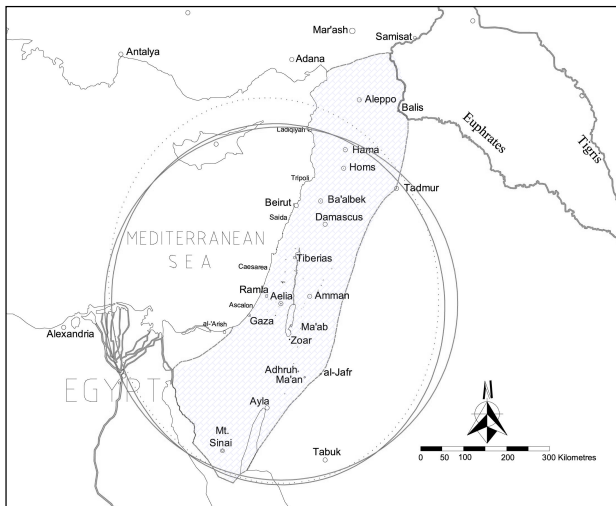
Map 1: Holy Land in Jerome's map

<sup>27</sup> “The Haram is sanctified in the seven skies the same extent it is on earth. Similarly, Bayt al-Maqdis is holy in the seven skies to the same extent it is on earth.”

<sup>28</sup> The word used for "extent" in Arabic is *Miqdâr*, the etymology of which may mean extent, vicinity or value. This thus gives a spiritual dimension to a geographical place.

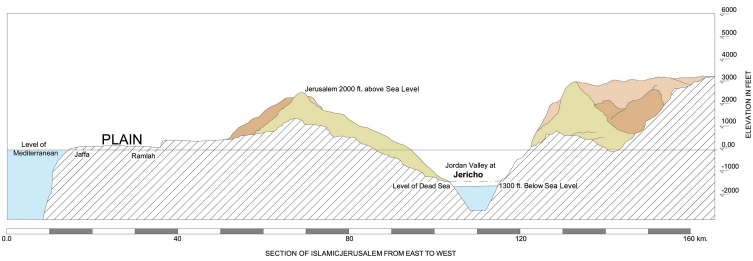
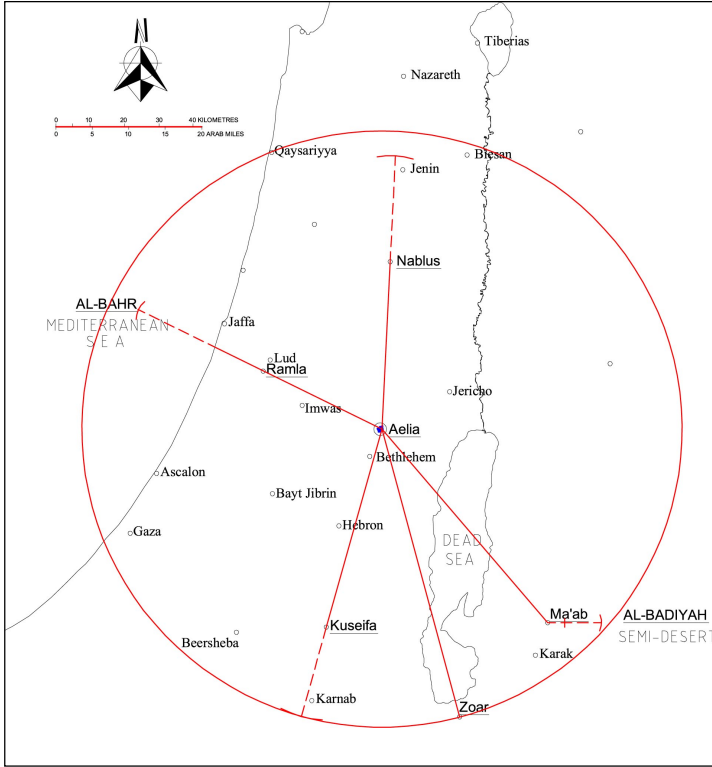


Map 2: The Holy Land in Madaba's mosaic map.

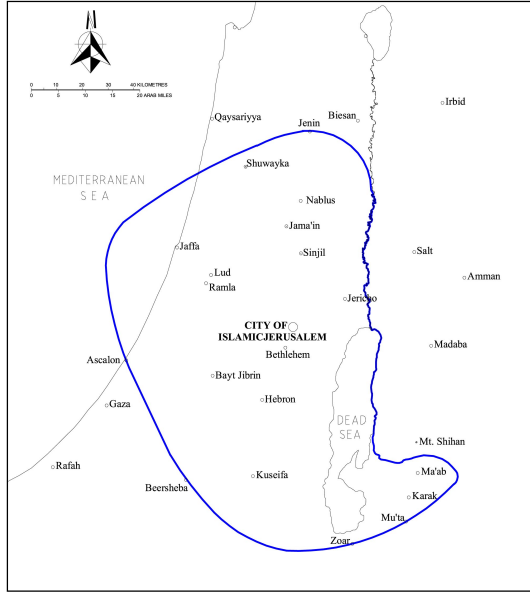


Map 3: Extent of the Land of Barakah over region of al-Sham, Source: El-Awaisi 2007.

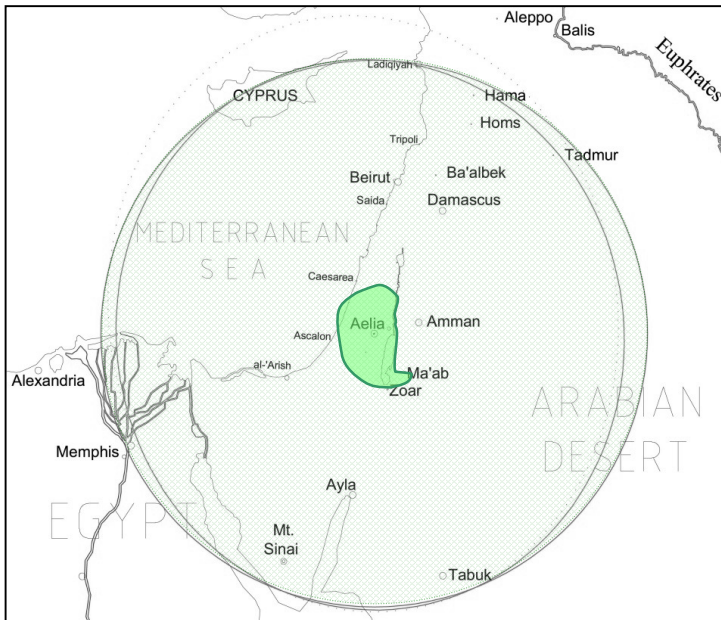
## Mapping the Borders of Holiness: IslamiJerusalem and Its Holy Land



**Map 4:** synthesis of the maximum extent of the boundaries according to the dimension and description of al-Maqdisi, below: Cross-section of the region East to West, **Source:** El-Awaisi 2007: 205-212.



**Map 5:** The boundaries of the region of Bayt al-Maqdis and the Holy Land  
**Source:** El-Awaisi 2007.



**Map 6:** Extents of Land of Barakah (outer circles) and Holy Land (in Middle),  
**Source:** El-Awaisi 2007.

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### Kutsalın Sınırlarını Çizmek: Beytülmağdis ve Kutsal Diyar

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**Atf/©:** El- Awaisi, Khalid, (2017). Kutsalın Sınırlarını Çizmek: Beytülmağdis ve Kutsal Diyar, Milet ve Nihal, 14 (2), 125-159.

**Öz:** Risaletten kısa bir süre sonra, henüz 7. Yüzyılda, İslam Peygamberi Hz. Muhammed, yaşadığı bölgeden daha uzak coğrafyalarla da ilgilenmeye başladı. Kuran ayetleri Beytülmağdis'ten ve çevre bölgelerinden bahsediyordu. (Bu bölgelerin ehemmiyeti Kur'anî terminolojide mündemiçtir.) Ancak bu bölgelerin özelde coğrafi kapsamına ve kavramlarına yönelik, daha genelde ise Kur'an coğrafyalarını ele alan çalışmalar oldukça sınırlıdır. Aksa Camiini çevreleyen, Arz-ı Mukaddes ya da Kutsal Diyar ve Bereketli Topraklar olarak adlandırılan bölgeler ise, geçmişte birçok kişi tarafından konu edilmiştir.

Arz-ı Mukaddes(Kutsal Diyar) düşüncesi, sabık dinler tarafından iyi bilinen ve 7. Yüzyılda gelen İslam dininden önce de var olan bir düşüncedir. Kutsal mekân fikri, Hz. Muhammed doğduğunda mevcut idi. Araçlar için kutsal mekânlar putlara göre anlam kazanırdı. Hristiyanlıkta da kutsal yapılar (türbeler, mabetler, tapınaklar) kutsal kalıntıların ve azizlerin çevresine dikilirdi. Kutsal mekânın bir diğer örnek boyutu da, kutsallığı daha geniş coğrafyalarca bilinen ve kutsal seyahat merkezleri olan bölgelerarası şehirlerdi. Mekke ve çevresi tüm Arabistan için hayati önemi haizdi. Aynı durum Hristiyanlar ve farklı coğrafyalardaki Yahudiler için Kudüs konusunda da geçerlidir. Hristiyanlar ve Yahudiler Kutsal Toprak idealini İslam'dan önce tesis etmişlerdi. Bu sebeple Kudüs ve Kutsal Topraklar onlar için çok önemli bir statüdedir. Bu statü İslam'da Beytülmağdis için, (Mekki ve Medeni ayetlerle teyit edilmiş) Kur'anî bir konum ile ihdas edilmiştir.

Bu bölgenin Hıristiyanlık ve Yahudilikten de öncesine, kadim peygamberlerin mirası olan bir kutsallık atfına dayandığı ileri sürülmektedir.

Aksa Mescidi'ni çevreleyen iki bölgeden bahsedilebilir. Mekke modelinin Beytülmakdis'te aynıyle tekrarlandığı görülür: Merkezde Aksa Mescidi ve onu çevreleyen iki bölge olarak Kutsal Diyar ve Mübarek Topraklar. Merkeze en yakın bölge çok detaylı tarif edilmiştir. Kutsal Diyar'ın sınırı ve alanı erken dönem çalışmalarda iyice tarif edilmiş ve yüzyıllar boyunca korunmaya devam etmiştir. Aksa Mescidi'ni çevreleyen ikinci bölge, daha geniş bir alanın kastedildiği Mübarek(Bereketli) Topraklar bölgesidir. Kutsal Topraklar ve Mübarek(Bereketli) Topraklar arasındaki, onların iki ayrı entite olarak işaretlenebileceği farkı anlamamak, İslam tarihinin son dönemlerini kavramada yanlışlıklara ve karışıklıklara sebep olacaktır. Kutsal Topraklar, Bereketli Toprakların içinde bir kısımdır ve açıktır ki tersi mümkün değildir.

Bu makale, Mekke'deki Haram Bölgesi'ne referanslar vererek, Müslümanların kutsal coğrafya fikrini ve bu fikrin Hıristiyan ve Yahudî kavramlardan farkını ele alacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Beytülmakdis, Mekke, kutsal toprak, bereket yurdu, kutsal mekan, sınırlar, Hıristiyan, Yahudi.

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