

# Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy



# Jerusalem in Muhammad's Strategy:

*The Role of the Prophet  
Muhammad in the Conquest  
of Jerusalem*

By

Abdallah Ma'rouf Omar

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# INTRODUCTION

The first Muslim *Fath*<sup>1</sup> (Conquest) of the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis*<sup>2</sup> in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE was a major turning point in the history of the medieval world, because *Bayt al-Maqdis* was under one of the main powers of the time (Byzantium). The *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis* would have required substantial preparation and planning to be successfully accomplished. Most people attribute this *Fath* to the second Muslim caliph, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Others attribute it to the first Muslim caliph, Abū Bakr, and argue that ‘Umar simply followed the directions of Abū Bakr. Yet the role of the Prophet Muhammad and his plan for this *Fath* are rarely mentioned, although his influence is clear in the events that led to the *Fath* of that vital region. This book looks into the role of the Prophet Muhammad in shaping the first Muslim *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

Numerous scholars and researchers have investigated the different aspects of the early Muslim era in *Bayt al-Maqdis*, namely the takeover of the region at the time of the second caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Yet a crucial element has been absent from this research, namely the influence of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam and the founder of the first Muslim state, on the events that took place in *Bayt al-Maqdis* and led to the Muslim *Fath*. These studies do not thoroughly examine the historical events that paved the way for Abū Bakr and then ‘Umar to take over the region.

Many questions are raised in this context: What motivated the Muslim conquest of *Bayt al-Maqdis*? What was the influence of the Prophet Muhammad on these events? Did the Prophet Muhammad facilitate the actual *Fath* or did he pay no attention to that region? These preliminary questions and many more must be answered to get a clearer picture of what happened in *Bayt al-Maqdis* during the first Muslim *Fath*. This book examines the time of the Prophet Muhammad and studies the Prophet’s strategic plan

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<sup>1</sup> The term “*Fath*” literally means opening; it is usually used in the Muslim sources to describe an achievement that took place with divine aid in peace and war. It is used to describe a Muslim conquest. A thorough explanation of the term “*Fath*” follows.

<sup>2</sup> An explanation of the term “*Bayt al-Maqdis*” follows.

for this *Faṭḥ* and his role and influence on the historical change that occurred in *Bayt al-Maqdis* after his death.

The study of the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis* has been limited mostly to the *ahādīth* (oral traditions of Muhammad) of the virtues of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and of al-Aqṣā Mosque, in addition to the Night Journey. Even the famous Night Journey, during which the Prophet Muhammad was carried from Makkah to Jerusalem and ascended into heaven, has been studied with concentration mainly on the Ascension to Heaven. Therefore, the study of the virtues of *Bayt al-Maqdis* has been narrowed into dealing with it as a gathering place of the Prophets only.

## Hypothesis

This book studies a hypothesis, namely that the Prophet Muhammad was the true planner for the Muslim *Faṭḥ* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. According to this understanding, Abū Bakr, and then ‘Umar, put this plan into action. According to this argument, all Muslim military campaigns towards the *Faṭḥ* of that region were in fact an application of this plan.

Many scholars, including Khalīl ‘Athāminah (2000, 88), Moshe Gil (1997, 21), Ibrāhīm Bayḍūn (1997, 8), Hanī Abū al-Rub (2002, 96), Usāmah Al-Ashqar (2006, 23), Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (2006, 50), Muhammad Shurrāb (1994, 74) and others state fairly similar arguments, namely that the Prophet Muhammad made preliminary steps towards the *Faṭḥ* of that region. Yet they have different views on the aims of these steps and how and when they started. ‘Athāminah and El-Awaisi seem to be the only ones to argue that the Prophet Muhammad developed the actual plan for the *Faṭḥ*. Other sources, such as those of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (1990, 35), S.D. Goitein (1986, (5) 323), and Ofer Livne-Kafri (2005, 216), argue the opposite, that *Bayt al-Maqdis* had no clear significance in the early stages of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, and that he did not plan the *Faṭḥ* in that region.

Therefore, the author examines the different hypotheses regarding the plan of the Prophet for the *Faṭḥ* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*, in an effort to reach a better understanding of the intentions of the Prophet Muhammad with regard to his relationship with *Bayt al-Maqdis*. This book examines many aspects of the *sīrah* (biography) of the Prophet Muhammad in an attempt to re-read the *sīrah* of the Prophet Muhammad in relation to *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

## Essential References

As mentioned above, numerous scholars have studied this issue and given their opinions on the role of the Prophet Muhammad in the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. One of the sources studied for this topic was Moshe Gil's (1992) book, *A History of Palestine 634–1099*, first published in Hebrew in 1983 and in English in 1992. Gil's detailed study analyses events in the *sīrah* of the Prophet Muhammad and their relationship with the *Fath*. His book concentrates on Palestine's 7<sup>th</sup> century boundaries. However, his analysis of the causes and motivations for his whole hypothesis depends only on an analysis of military events. In another article, 'The Political History of Jerusalem', he claims that "It seems unlikely that the sacred status of Jerusalem was one of the motivations which led Muhammad to mount military campaigns against the Byzantine frontier not long before his death" (Gil 1996, 4). Thus he attributes the actions of the Prophet Muhammad towards the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis* to commercial and political reasons. Gil does not address Islamic primary sources (e.g. the Qur'ān) in his analysis, which neglects the first and most important sources that identify these aims, namely, the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad is considered a prophet by Muslims, and as such he was greatly influenced by the Qur'ān, including in his attitude towards *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Therefore, Islamic primary sources should be taken into consideration in this context.

Another source that deals with this issue is Muhammad Ḥasan Shurrāb's book, *Bayt al-Maqdis wa al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* published in 1994. This book states that the Prophet Muhammad made a number of steps towards the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Yet he does not analyse these steps or events in depth and does not expand his analysis. He also neglects some key issues, such as the documents of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another important contemporary writer to tackle this issue is Ibrāhīm Bayḍūn (1997) in his book, *Tarīkh Bilād al-Shām*. Bayḍūn is a historian who is interested in the history of the Umayyad caliphate. He is also interested in the history of the Levant (al-Shām), which includes the geographical area from Aleppo in Syria to al-ʿArīsh in Egypt. He tackles both the military and political movements of the Prophet Muhammad and argues that the aim of these movements was the *Fath* of the Levant in general. He does not relate this to *Bayt al-Maqdis* in any way, thus neglecting its role in stimulating the Prophet to form such a strategy.

Another source discussing the issue is *Filistīn fī Khamsat Qurūn*, by Khalīl ‘Athāminah (2000). ‘Athāminah is a historian of Arab Muslim history including the history of the Levant in the Muslim era. In this book, ‘Athāminah studies what he calls the “Early *Fath* Plan in the Prophetic Era” (2000, 88). He discusses this topic from a political angle only, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad drew a plan towards the *Fath* of Palestine during the last years of his life. ‘Athāminah limits his study to Palestine in its contemporary boundaries only. Also, he neglects many aspects that shaped the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis* from the early stage of his Prophethood. Because ‘Athāminah studies the Prophet Muhammad as a political leader only and not as a Prophet, he limits his study to the military steps taken by the Prophet Muhammad in the last years of his life. Therefore, he neglects the main point of reference of the Prophet Muhammad, which would reveal the real motivations for him to draw up such a plan. This leads ‘Athāminah to view these military steps as only political and commercial, which neglects the main historical character of the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. that of being a Prophet.

Hānī Abū al-Rub examines this issue in his book, *Tārīkh Filistīn fī Šadr al-Islām* (2002). This book was originally a PhD thesis that Abū al-Rub submitted for his PhD Degree in Muslim History at the University of Baghdad, in Iraq, in 1998. In his book, Abū al-Rub identifies *Filistīn* (Palestine) as the historical 7<sup>th</sup> century Palestine, which was close to the boundaries of the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. However, he devotes only 10 pages to the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and that region, combining the Prophet Muhammad’s military actions with those of Abū Bakr and considering them as only the preparatory steps for campaigns.

One of the sources to study this issue is *Introducing IslamicJerusalem* by Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, first published in 2005. El-Awaisi established a field of inquiry called “IslamicJerusalem Studies”. He invented the term “IslamicJerusalem” to refer to the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis*, as its geographical boundaries are understood in some Muslim sources. He states that the Prophet Muhammad formed “a strategic plan” for the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. He even identifies the starting point for this plan as the Night Journey. He goes on to analyse a number of events that took place in the Prophet Muhammad’s life and interprets these as elements of this plan. However, due to the nature of his book, he does not conduct further analysis of historical events directly related to this topic.

One of the sources to deal with this topic is the book *Futūḥ Filistīn* by Usāmah al-Ashqar (2006). In this book, al-Ashqar examines the preliminary

steps of the first Muslim *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis* during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. He discusses the Prophet Muhammad's strategy to prepare for the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Nevertheless, al-Ashqar concentrates only on the military and diplomatic approach of the Prophet without further discussion of the motivations of such a strategy. In addition, he concentrates mainly on the contemporary boundaries of Palestine.

As well as the above-mentioned authors who tackle this issue in detail, Amnon Cohen touches upon the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis* in his book, *al-Quds, Dirāsāt fī Tārīkh al-Madinah* (1990). He argues that there is no doubt that the Prophet Muhammad had the city of Jerusalem in mind and planned its *Fath*. Yet Cohen attributes this to, as he claims, the Prophet Muhammad being influenced by the status of Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity. Cohen goes no further in studying the Prophet's plan, yet he extends his analysis of this Jewish-Christian influence, which led the Prophet Muhammad to form a strategy that would have meant becoming closer to the Jews and Christians and that would have given him authenticity in their eyes. Cohen neglects the most important aspect in identifying the Prophet Muhammad's relationship with that region, namely the Qur'an.

This book bridges the gaps in these analyses and studies. It studies the practical, religious, and political relationships between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. It begins with the first and most important element to influence the Prophet Muhammad and draw his attention to *Bayt al-Maqdis*, namely the Qur'an. The Night Journey and the practical obligations of Islam, mainly Prayer, are examined and studied in this context. These elements assist in identifying the actual manifestations of the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Then the actual diplomatic and political movements of the Prophet Muhammad towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* are studied, so that the existence of such a plan may be determined, and if it exists, the indications of this plan.

## Methodological notes

This book uses both historical methodology and *ḥadīth* methodology to analyse sources. As this book deals with a historical issue regarding the Prophet Muhammad, historical methodology is employed. Additionally, as this book examines the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which requires analysis of Islamic core sources, the *ahādīth* of the Prophet and the *ḥadīth* methodology is used along with historical methodology in an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach.

The historical methodology is used for critical evaluation and study of different historical documents used in research. The author applies historical methodology when dealing with historical sources, such as books of history and the *ṣirah* (Biography of the Prophet Muhammad), by examining and analysing the language of the documents and the ideas within their texts. The author collects texts and information on the events from the various historical sources that deal with the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and then critically analyses and compares them to determine the most acceptable understanding. Then, these analysed data can be linked to historical events that took place during that period in the context of the main hypothesis, i.e. the plan of the Prophet Muhammad for the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

The *ḥadīth* methodology deals mainly and strictly with the use of the *ahādīth* of the Prophet Muhammad and their authenticity. It also deals with the evaluation of the narrators wherever such an evaluation is needed in the study. However, the author mainly deals with authentic *ahādīth* sources (such as those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim). Thus, the *ḥadīth* methodology is employed only when evaluating less authentic *ahādīth*. As part of using the *ḥadīth* methodology interchangeably with the historical methodology, if a *ḥadīth* is mentioned as the only reference to any event, its authenticity is examined and evaluated; if it is weak, it is used as a historical text. The *ḥadīth* is then compared with other historical texts and examined on this basis. Thus, if a very weak *ḥadīth* or narration contradicts another historical text, it is dealt with using historical methodology. Indeed, an authentic *ḥadīth* is more accurate than a historical account, yet a weak *ḥadīth* is equal to or stronger than a historical narration, due to the rigorousness of the *ḥadīth* methodology in identifying authentic *ahādīth*.

It must be noted that the author conducts this evaluation and analysis according to Muslim sources and Islamic primary sources. For example, according to Muslim theology, Muhammad is a Prophet and the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad to Jerusalem is a fact, not a myth. Additionally, the Qur'ān is considered the literal word of God according to Islamic theology, and the *ḥadīth* is considered the second primary source in Islam, after the Qur'ān, with the same status as that of the Qur'ān in Muslim belief.

## Terminology

Jerusalem is considered holy by all three major monotheistic religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Throughout history, this holiness has contributed to substantial tension among the followers of these religions.

The history and even the terminology used to describe this region are in disagreement. Some terms can have different, and sometimes confusing, meanings depending on the background of the user.

For example, the term "Jerusalem" is widely used in the English language to refer to the well-known holy city. Yet some Arabic speakers feel that this term does not represent their view of the nature of the city and its holiness in Islam. Thus, most Arabic speakers use the term *al-Quds* (the holy), which usually refers to "total purification". Many of the *ahādith* of the Prophet Muhammad use the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* which, in the author's opinion, usually refers to the al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem and sometimes to the Holy Land region. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the city was named Aelia. Muslims used the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* in later times to refer to the city and sometimes to a wider region that could be considered the Islamic Holy Land. The boundaries of this land were studied and described thoroughly by al-Maqdisī (1906, 137). The author (2018, 59) drew the rough boundaries of the Islamic Holy Land as seen in Map 1.



**Map (1):** The boundaries of the Islamic Holy Land. Drawn by the Author

Khalid El-Awaisi (2007) published a book on the boundaries of what he refers to as “IslamicJerusalem” and identified its boundaries. These boundaries in fact almost correspond with the boundaries that al-Maqqdisī (1906, 137) describes as the boundaries of the Islamic Holy Land. However, the term “IslamicJerusalem” may raise numerous controversies since it connects two understandable words together in a way that may be misunderstood as an attempt to link Jerusalem only to Islam and exclude other religions.

Therefore, since this book studies the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and Jerusalem and, at the same time, the Islamic “Holy Land”, then it could be more accurate to use the term that the Prophet used to refer to this region, i.e. *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Translating this term into English may be more confusing than dealing with it as it is in the Arabic language, since it may alter the meaning of the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad and therefore lead to an inaccurate conclusion. However, the author refers to the city as “Jerusalem” when there is a clear reference to the city of Jerusalem, because of the widespread use of this term in the English language.

Also, throughout this book, the author uses the term *Fath*, rather than “Conquest”, when referring to the Muslim conquest of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. An exception is the use of the term “conquest” in the title of the book; however this is to make it easier for the English reader to understand the idea of the book. It should be noted that the Muslim sources use the term فتح *Fath* rather than “conquest”. This term has a relatively different meaning in the Arabic language to the term “conquest”, which has a negative connotation and usually refers to war. Yet *Fath* in Arabic does not necessarily refer to war or military action. A *Fath* might be a peace treaty, such as the description of the treaty of *al-Hudaybiyah* between the Prophet Muhammad and his foes, the Quraysh tribe, which was described in the Qur’ān as a *Fath* (Qur’ān 48:1). The author uses the term *Fath* in its Arabic meaning, to refer to the Muslim “conquest” of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The author’s decision was a result of a discussion that took place on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006 in Dundee, the UK. The author presented a paper titled “Islamic Jerusalem and the Prophet Muhammad: Challenging Understanding”. The discussion was raised by a respected politician, namely Ernie Ross, a former Member of the British Parliament for Dundee West in Scotland. Ross highlighted the misconception that the term “conquest” might cause when referring to this matter. Therefore, the author uses the transliterated Arabic term *Fath*. *Fath* literally means “opening” (see Baalbaki 2001, 814), and it implies victory, whether in war, when achieving peace or when solving a problem.



# CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Introduction

This chapter aims to set a background for the hypothesis of the plan of the Prophet Muhammad for the *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and thus set out the Prophet's potential reasons for developing such a plan. The historical background of *Bayt al-Maqdis*, prior to and at the beginning of the Prophethood of Muhammad, presents a clearer picture of the situation in the region at that time.

This chapter also studies some of the main events that shaped the status of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Islam. This includes the early Qur'ānic texts dealing with that region, such as Chapter 30 of the Qur'ān, *al-Rūm*, the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad to *Bayt al-Maqdis*, and praying towards *Bayt al-Maqdis*. This establishes a background for the Prophet Muhammad's interest in *Bayt al-Maqdis*, and clarifies the causes of his later actions towards conquering that region.

### The Political Situation in Bayt al-Maqdis Before Muhammad's Prophethood

The Romans, under the leadership of Pompey, seized the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and established their rule over the city of Jerusalem in September 63 BCE (Wilkinson 1990, 75). There are no clear records on the nature of the relationship between the population of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and the Romans. Yet it seems that the situation in *Bayt al-Maqdis* frequently changed according to circumstances and worsened during the later period of this rule.

With the emergence of Jesus Christ, a new monotheistic religion, Christianity, was born in *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The majority of the existing Jewish community did not accept the new faith, which could explain why the Christians were persecuted. However, the Roman Emperor Hadrian destroyed a Jewish revolution and developed a new region, Aelia, and established a new city, Aelia Capitolina. The Jews were persecuted and expelled from the region after the Revolution of Bar Kokhba broke up in 132 CE (see Goldhill 2005,

81). Wilkinson (1990, 88) argues that there were many Syrians and Arabs among the exempted people who were allowed to reside in the region of *Bayt al-Maqdis* after the expulsion of the Jews. Othman al-Tel (2003, 216-218) and Fatimatuzzahra' Abdrahman (2005, 141-142) agree with Wilkinson.

## **Romans Become “Byzantines”**

Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and was baptised before his death in 337 CE, causing a drastic transformation of the whole Roman Empire from a pagan culture into the Christian Empire (see McHenry 1993, (2) 699). However, an important event occurred following this conversion: the division of the Roman Empire. The eastern section, namely Eastern Europe and the Asian parts of the Roman Empire, became the Byzantine Empire. The western section, namely Western Europe, became the Holy Roman Empire (see McHenry 1993, (2) 699). The capital of the western Holy Roman Empire was Rome, and the capital of the eastern Byzantine Empire was Byzantium<sup>3</sup>, from then on called Constantinople.

During the early time of the Prophet Muhammad, before his Prophethood, *Bayt al-Maqdis* was ruled by the Byzantines, who were considered to be Eastern Christians (see Jones 2005, (10) 6912), now known as Orthodox Christians. Unlike the Catholic Church, which had a single bishop at its head, namely the Pope of Rome, the Orthodox Eastern Church had several bishops. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there have been four major centres of the Orthodox Church: Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Alexandria (see Jones 2005, (4) 2581).

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Byzantine” originally comes from the name “Byzantium”, which is defined in the Modern Encyclopaedia Illustrated (Gorell 1962, (2) 442) as:

A city founded on the shore of the Bosphorus (early 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) by Greek colonists from Megara, occupied a position of strategic and commercial importance by reason of its command over the entrance of the Black Sea. Taken by the Roman Septimus Severus (AD 196), it was re-founded as Constantinople, the metropolis of the eastern Roman Empire, by Constantine in AD 330.

This shows that the city of Constantinople was originally called Byzantium, but was re-founded by Emperor Constantine and became the capital of the eastern Roman Empire; thus the Empire was named “the Byzantine Empire” after the original name of Constantinople.

## **The Political Situation in Bayt al-Maqdis at the Beginning of Muhammad's Prophethood**

To gain more understanding of the political situation of this era, the author focuses on those historians who were interested in the events that took place between the Persians and Byzantines generally and in *Bayt al-Maqdis* particularly. The author focuses on three main sources, namely: the *Chronicon Paschale* (Chr. P.) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; the *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (d. 818 CE)<sup>4</sup>, who lived and wrote his book in the 9<sup>th</sup> century; and the account of Antiochus Strategos, who lived in the city of Jerusalem at that period and witnessed the Persian invasion of the region and the city. The first two sources discuss this period in detail, while the third specifically discusses the Persian conquest of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The Chr. P. was written during the time of the events it describes, therefore it is considered a reliable source. Theophanes transcribed many of the events from other historians; however, Theophanes endeavoured to be accurate, so his book can be considered an important source. Strategos mentions only one event that took place throughout a short period, but the detail and thoroughness of the account provide key insights into the event.

Muhammad became Prophet, as many historical accounts state, in the year 610 CE (see al-Mubarakpuri 1996, 68). Prior to and during that period, the Byzantine and the Persian Empires were in a long and bitter war. Wilkinson (1990, 100) argues that Parthian<sup>5</sup> attacks on Rome had occurred since 41 BCE and continued after the creation of the Sasanid Persian Empire, with occasional times of peace, such as the 50-year peace treaty that Justinian made with the Persians. One of the most important turning points in the war between the two empires was when Chosroes invaded the Byzantine territories in 602 CE, only eight years before the Prophethood of Muhammad. Theophanes also documents this in his *Chronicle* (see Theophanes 1997, 418-420).

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<sup>4</sup> The author investigated some historical sources that were written in that period or slightly later and found only three sources that dealt with that period (and can be found in English): Theophanes, the Chr. P., and Strategos. The latter was written after the Persian invasion of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; Chr. P. was written in Constantinople also in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the first lived about 200 years after and depended on different sources in his *Chronicle*. Most of the sources are in Greek or Latin.

<sup>5</sup> According to Wilkinson (1990, 100), the Parthians were the rulers of Persia before Ardashir created the Sasanid Persian Empire in 224 CE.

Theophanes argues that the war started in Edessa<sup>6</sup> when a Byzantine general, Narses, seized the city and instigated a rebellion against the new Byzantine emperor Phokas. Narses refused to accept the way Phokas had declared himself emperor and was against Phokas' assassination of key Byzantine leaders and generals along with their families. Theophanes states that Narses requested help from Persian emperor Chosroes to defeat the Byzantine emperor. Chosroes sent his army and declared war against the Byzantines in 602 CE.

Interestingly, the Chr. P. does not mention the Persian role in this chaos, although the authors of this source were alive and lived in Constantinople during that period (see Chr. P. 1989, 142-145). The authors of the Chr. P. could have been more interested in the events taking place in Constantinople itself, as the capital of the empire, or they may have had no clear idea of what was happening in Edessa at that time.

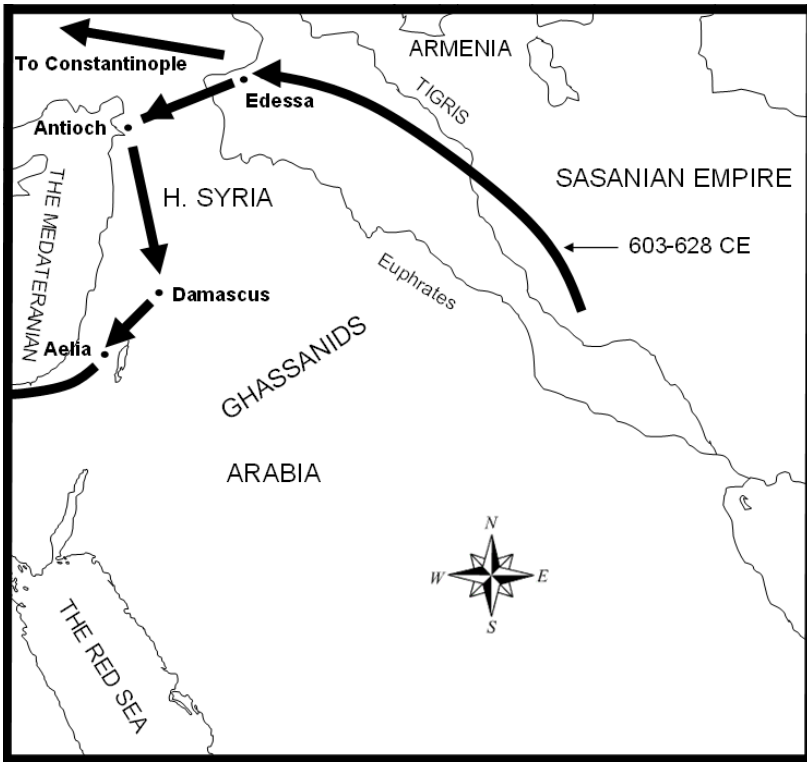
By analysing the historical sequence, it can be argued that the Persians were in fact trying to seize more lands and get closer to the Byzantine capital, i.e. Constantinople, since Edessa was only about 950 km southeast of Constantinople. This would have helped them to gain the upper hand over the Byzantines and provided a golden opportunity to destroy the Byzantine Empire or, at least, substantially weaken it.

It has been noted that the Persians, according to Theophanes, did not attack the al-Shām (the Levant) region directly, which means that they might not have intended to attack *Bayt al-Maqdis* for religious reasons. The main aim could have been political. However, it can be argued that the Persians were aiming to seize the southeastern territories of the Byzantine Empire starting at Edessa, since this was considered the chief barrier between the main Byzantine lands, i.e. Asia Minor, and the non-Byzantine ones,<sup>7</sup> namely al-Shām and Egypt. This can be proven by many historical accounts such as those of Theophanes and by the Chr. P., which shows the line taken by the Persian troops after the attack on Edessa and the area around it (see Theophanes 1997, 422-424), as is shown in Map 2.

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<sup>6</sup> Edessa is in Asia Minor, in the southeastern part of Turkey, about 950 km southeast of Istanbul. Alexander the Great first named it Edessa. Today it is called Şanlıurfa (also known as Urfa). (see: *Republic of Turkey, ministry of culture and tourism*, date consulted: 17-5-2006, <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN/BelgeGoster.aspx?17A16AE30572D313404F9755767D76FF89326D2B69E01EEB>)

<sup>7</sup> This means those regions that were occupied by races other than the original Byzantines, such as the Arabs, Copts (who are considered a different race than the Arabs), etc.



**Map (2):** The Persian invasion and the cities taken from Byzantium in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Drawn by the author, based on: Compareti (2002)

This understanding may contradict the hypothesis that the Persians wanted to destroy the whole Byzantine Empire and attack Constantinople. However, the Persians may have been aiming to conquer the regions that were some distance from the centre of Byzantine power, i.e. Constantinople. In this way, they would have secured their position during their final attack on the main Byzantine region. Thus, they attacked Edessa and by so doing isolated the Byzantine troops located in al-Shām and separated the Byzantine capital from many of the main territories under their power in the South. By attacking al-Shām and Egypt, the Persians would have had an important entrance to the Mediterranean, which would have helped them in any future movements against Constantinople and Asia Minor.

This shows that the political situation of *Bayt al-Maqdis*, as a reflection of the whole situation of al-Shām, was unstable and, of course, not peaceful. During this time, Muhammad became a Prophet and received the revelation from God, according to the Muslim belief, in 610 CE (see al-Mubarakpuri 1996, 68). It seems, from the various accounts of the early stages of the *sirah* (biography) of the Prophet Muhammad, that after his Prophethood, the situation in al-Shām and *Bayt al-Maqdis* in particular remained relatively calm for a while. This can be concluded by studying the general accounts about the caravans of Quraysh<sup>8</sup> to al-Shām, as mentioned in an early stage in the Qurʾān (106, 1-4) (see al-Zarkashī 1998, (1) 193). There are no reports that these caravans were stopped during that time, despite the war between the Persians and the Byzantines. Such an event, i.e. preventing the caravans of Quraysh from entering that region, would have been reported. Therefore, the situation in that region was likely still fairly calm. This fragile situation in *Bayt al-Maqdis* continued until the Persian invasion of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

### The Persian Invasion of Bayt al-Maqdis

The Persians attacked the whole region of al-Shām including *Bayt al-Maqdis* within a short time. This attack is noted in many historical accounts, such as the Chr. P., which was written soon after the war in Constantinople. However, Strategos' account of this era may be the most important, since he witnessed the war and mentioned the conquest of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in particular in the year 614 CE. The following is the account from the Chr. P. (1989, 156):

In this year in about the month of June, we suffered a calamity which deserves unceasing lamentations. For, together with many cities of the east, Jerusalem too was captured by the Persians.

This account shows that many cities fell under Persian conquest at around the same time, although none of these cities and regions is named except for Jerusalem. Theophanes mentions the regions that were occupied along with the city of Jerusalem; he mentions (1997, 431) the region of “the Jordan, Palestine, and the Holy City”. This shows that he meant the area within *Bayt al-Maqdis* or very close to it, not the whole al-Shām region, since he mentions, for example, that the Persians occupied Damascus in the year 613 CE (see Theophanes 1997, 430).

Strategos, however, concentrates on the city of Jerusalem (Aelia). He first describes the route the Persians took on their way to the city of Jerusalem

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<sup>8</sup> Quraysh was the name of the Prophet Muhammad's tribe.

after they occupied the northern areas of al-Shām. He also mentions some of the places and cities occupied by the Persians on their way to Jerusalem. He says:

And they reached Palestine and its borders, and they arrived at Caesarea, which is the metropolis. But there they begged for a truce, and bowed their necks in submission. After that the enemy advanced to Sarapeon, and captured it, as well as all the seaboard cities together with their hamlets... Next they reached Judea; and came to a large and famous city, a Christian city, which is Jerusalem. (Conybeare 1910, 503)

This description shows that the Persian movement was from the north to the southeast. Linking this with Theophanes' account of the Persian occupation of Damascus in 613 CE, it seems that the Persian army moved from Damascus to Adhrī'āt, then towards the Palestinian seaboard passing through the northern part of the Jordan valley towards Caesarea and then south to Sarapeon (Arsūf)<sup>9</sup>; they then arrived at Jerusalem from the northwest.

Although Theophanes lived in the ninth century and the Chr. P. was written in the seventh, the author argues that Theophanes was more accurate in recording some of these events. This could be due to his dependence on other sources, unlike the Chr. P., which depended on the authors' own experiences in Constantinople in the year 630 CE (see Chr. P. 1989, back page). This caused the Chr. P. to be abbreviated in many parts since its writers were situated generally in Constantinople. However, Strategos was more detailed than Theophanes and the Ch. P. since he witnessed the whole event and thus his description is that of an eyewitness. Yet Strategos was not aware of the movement of the Persians before they reached Palestine, possibly because of the unstable situation within *Bayt al-Maqdis* or due to Strategos' lack of interest.

## The Status of Bayt al-Maqdis in Islam

*Bayt al-Maqdis* has been important to Muslims since the early years of Islam in Makkah. M.R. Nor (2006, 299) argues that this region:

Is indeed firmly established in the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* as well as in the Muslims' history, and thus occupies the highest status in every Muslim's belief, mind and heart.

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<sup>9</sup> Sarapeon is the city of Arsūf on the Palestinian seaboard (see Delgado (n.d): <http://www.biblioteca-tercer-milenio.com/sala-de-lectura/Bizancio-Vasiliev/docs/DestrucciondeJerusalen.htm>, date consulted: 07-01-2008); it is located south of Caesarea and north of Jaffa to the north west of Jerusalem.

When studying the general status of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Islam, one can easily conclude that *Bayt al-Maqdis* occupies a very important status in the Muslim mind. This can be understood when studying the verses of the Qurʾān and the *aḥādīth* that deal with the significance of *Bayt al-Maqdis*<sup>10</sup>.

ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways (2002, 27) argues that “Muslims, throughout fourteen centuries, looked at *Bayt al-Maqdis* in holiness, and considered it as a centre of great religious legacy that must be protected, they strongly connect al-Ḥarām Mosque in Makkah with al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem”. ʿUways adds, “Even when the Muslims all over the world direct their prayer towards al-Ḥarām Mosque, they never forget that their Prophet, Muhammad, and his companions prayed towards al-Aqṣā Mosque, the first *Qiblah*”<sup>11</sup> (Direction of Prayer in Islam), before the revelation of the Qurʾānic verses that ordered to change the *Qiblah*, until today, there is a mosque in Madīnah that is called “the Mosque of the two *Qiblah*”, and it is considered as a living witness to the religious connection between Makkah and *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The author agrees with ʿUways and adds that the rich Muslim narrations on the importance of *Bayt al-Maqdis* reflect the huge importance of this region and its very high status in Islam.

However, Lazarus-Yafeh (1990, 41-42) claims that the holiness of that region in Islam was developed by time and faced resistance. She depends on some *aḥādīth* by the Prophet Muhammad that mention the holiness of Makkah and Madīnah and neglect *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Lazarus-Yafeh claims that this resistance was begun by numerous Muslim figures and scholars such as Ibn Taymiyah (d. 728 AH / 1328 CE). The same is also argued by Livne-Kafri (2005, 216), who claims that the Umayyads had an important role in developing this status in Islam through their building activities in the city of Jerusalem. However, the status of *Bayt al-Maqdis* is clear in many of the *aḥādīth* of the Prophet Muhammad and by many Muslim scholars and historians. Ibn Taymiyah, for example, encourages Muslims to visit al-Aqṣā Mosque for prayer and argues that it is *Mustahab* (preferable) (1997, (26) 83). He also discusses the revered status of that region in many of his written works (see Ibn Taymiyah 1997, (27) 7-8), unlike Lazarus-Yafeh’s claims.

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<sup>10</sup> The author does not go into details on this issue because first, it has been studied thoroughly by Nor, and second, to keep the focus of this book.

<sup>11</sup> The word *Qiblah* refers to the “direction of prayer” (Qalʿajī 1988, 356). The word *قِبْلَة* *Qiblah* in the Arabic Language comes from the root ق ب ل *Qāf Baʿ Lām*. It, literally, means “direction” (see Ibn Manẓūr 1999, (11) 25, al-Fayrūzʾābādī 1991, (4) 46).



## References to Bayt al-Maqdis in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān has referred to *Bayt al-Maqdis* since the early stages of its revelation. For example, Chapter 95 in the Qur'ān starts:

By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai, and by this City of Security. (95:1-3)<sup>12</sup>

This chapter is one of the early revealed chapters of the Qur'ān, as al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH / 1392 CE) (1998, (1) 193) and others mention.

Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H / 1372 CE) reflects on these verses (1994, (4) 681):

These are three sites where God sent one of the major Messengers who brought the Laws. The first place is that of the fig and the olive, which is *Bayt al-Maqdis*, where God sent Jesus the Son of Mary. The second place is *Tūr Sīnīn*, i.e. Mount Sinai, where God spoke to Moses the son of Omran. The third place is Makkah, and it is the city of security, where whoever enters is safe, and it is the place where God sent Muhammad.<sup>13</sup>

Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1967 CE) (1996, (6) 3933) also agrees with Ibn Kathīr. It should be noted that the text equates the presence of the fig and olive with the presence of Mount Sinai and Makkah, thus what is meant by the fig and the olive is most likely the land of figs and olives. Also, it should be noted that the verses of the Qur'ān that mention the land of *Barakah*<sup>14</sup> (blessing), which is the term usually used to refer to either *Bayt al-Maqdis* or the lands around it, were all revealed in the Makkan period. Four verses mention the Land of *Barakah*, and all were revealed in Makkah. This is significant in showing the importance the Qur'ān gave to that region from an early stage.

Moreover, one can find numerous *aḥādīth* that mention the importance of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Islam. For example, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 H / 855 CE) (1995, (13) 99) narrates from Dhū al-Aṣḥabī, the companion of the Prophet Muhammad:

I asked: O Messenger of God, if we were tested by staying alive after your death, where do you order us to go? The Prophet said: "Go to *Bayt al-Maqdis*,

<sup>12</sup> والتين والزيتون، وطور سينين، وهذا البلد الأمين

هذه محال ثلاثة بعث الله في كل واحد منها نبيا مرسلًا من أولي العزم أصحاب الشرائع الكبار. فالأول محلة التين والزيتون وهي بيت المقدس التي بعث الله فيها عيسى ابن مريم عليه السلام، والثاني طور سينين وهو طور سيناء الذي كلم الله عليه موسى بن عمران، والثالث مكة وهو البلد الأمين الذي من دخله كان آمناً وهو الذي أرسل فيه محمداً صلى الله عليه وسلم

<sup>14</sup> On the meaning and the use of the term *Barakah*, the author refers to Usāmah al-Ashqar's book "*Al-Barakah*" (2015, 11-15).

so you might bring up descendants who go to that Mosque by day and night.”<sup>15</sup>

This *ḥadīth* shows the great importance that the Prophet Muhammad gave to *Bayt al-Maqdis*. It should also be noted that the Prophet spoke this *ḥadīth* during his lifetime, i.e. before the actual Muslim *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. The status of *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Islam could have justified the Prophet Muhammad’s interest in that region.

One of the main events discussed in the Qur’ān, namely Chapter 30 *al-Rūm*, is the defeat of the Byzantines by the Persians and the Persian invasion of Jerusalem. According to many exegetes and scholars of the Qur’ānic sciences, this event is mentioned in the first five verses of this chapter, as follows:

(1) Alif Lām Mīm, (2) the *Rūm* have been defeated, (3) in *Adnā al-Ard*, and after their defeat they will gain victory, (4) within a few years. To God belongs the whole decision before and after, and on that day the believers will rejoice, (5) by the victory (granted by) God, He grants victory to whomever he wills, and he is the Almighty, the Merciful<sup>16</sup>. (Qur’ān 30:1-5)

Mentioning this event in the Qur’ān shows how important it was to Muslims. The importance of this event is in fact due to the importance of the region where the clash took place. The Qur’ān never commented on the fall of Damascus, Antioch, Homs, or other political and religious Byzantine centres in the Levant except when it came to the fall of Jerusalem.

The interest of the Qur’ān in mentioning the times of the Persian conquests of *Bayt al-Maqdis* and then the victory of the Byzantines shows that there might be a relation between these events and the Muslim *Fath* of *Bayt al-Maqdis*. As far as dates and durations are concerned, the Persians conquered *Bayt al-Maqdis* in 614 CE, and the Byzantines gained their first victory over them about 9 years later in 624 CE, as the Qur’ān describes.<sup>17</sup> This shows to what extent the event mentioned in Chapter 30 of the Qur’ān was considered

عن ذي الأصابع أنه قال: قلت: يا رسول الله، إن ابتلينا بالبقاء بعدك أين تأمرنا؟ قال: عليك ببيت المقدس، فاعله أن ينشأ لك ذرية يغدون إلى ذلك المسجد ويروحون.

(1) ألم، (2) غلبت الروم، (3) في أدنى الأرض وهم من بعد غلبهم سيغلبون، (4) في بضع سنين، الله الأمر من قبل ومن بعد ويومئذ يفرح المؤمنون (5) ينصر الله، ينصر من يشاء وهو العزيز الرحيم.

<sup>17</sup> The author published an article that studies these verses of the Qur’ān and their relationship with the events that took place in detail. The article is titled “Islamic Jerusalem and the First Qur’ānic Prophecy: a Study of the First Verses in Chapter 30 ‘Al-Rūm’”, published in the Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies, Vol. 10, in 2009.

important and significant. These verses can be considered the first Qur'anic prophecy, and they are related to *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

## Praying Towards Bayt al-Maqdis

Prayer is the second pillar of Islam after the testimony of faith; it is the only obligation that all Muslims, whatever their situation regarding finance, health, work, etc., must perform on a daily basis. Other obligations may vary from one person to another and are restricted by time and place. Some Muslims may be exempted from such obligations for differences in circumstances, such as wealth or poverty, health or illness. Since prayer is unique to such an extent in Islam, any connection between prayer and *Bayt al-Maqdis* must also be very significant.

The Arabic term for “prayer” is صلاة *Ṣalāh*, which linguistically comes from the Arabic root صلا *Ṣala*. Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711 AH / 1311 CE) (1999, (7) 397), al-Jirjānī (d. 816 AH / 1413 CE) (2002, 112) and al-Fayrūz'ābādī (1991, (4) 510) argue that it means “supplication”. The author argues that the term *Ṣalāh* in its linguistic meaning, i.e. supplication, is more likely to be related to another Arabic term derived from a very close Arabic root, namely, صلة *Ṣilah*, which means “engagement” (see Baalbaki: 2001, 699). This term derives from the Arabic root وصل *Waṣala*, meaning “to link” or “to connect” (see Baalbaki 2001, 1235). This meaning is also related to that given by Ibn Manẓūr, al-Jirjānī, and al-Fayrūz'ābādī, since supplication represents a link and a connection between the invocator (i.e. the person) and the invocated (i.e. God). Thus it could be understood that the concept of prayer in Islam represents the connection between the human being and God, and this is what gives prayer its importance in Islam.

The obligation of five prayers in Islam began during the Night Journey, according to different *aḥādīth*. For example, Imām Muslim (2000, (1) 82) narrates the authentic *ḥadīth* of the story of the obligation of the five prayers that occurred in heaven during the Night Journey and the Ascension. Some scholars argue that the start of Prayer in Islam was from a very early stage, referring to one of the earliest revealed chapters of the Qur'ān, namely Chapter 73 (*al-Muẓṣammil*). This chapter is one of the earliest in the Qur'ān to be revealed; the first two verses of Chapter 73 read:

O you, who are enfolded in your cloak! Keep awake throughout the night, all except a small part of it.<sup>18</sup> (73:1-2)

Many exegetes, including Ibn Kathīr (1994, (4) 558), al-Ṭabarī (1999, (12) 278-279), Al-Zamakhsharī (1995, (4) 623-624), al-Rāzī (2002, (15) 172-173) and al-Alūsī (1994, (15) 114), interpret verse (73:2), “Keep awake throughout the night”, as referring to praying throughout the night. This is also true for verse (73:20) of the same chapter: “Indeed, your Lord knows that you stand [to pray at night] less than two-thirds of the night, [sometimes] half of it, and [sometimes] one-third of it, and so does a group of those [the believers] who are with you”. The author argues that this latter verse actually affirms the night-long prayer and notes a reduction of the night prayer for early Muslims.

There are numerous *ḥadīth* narrations that mention the prayer in Makkah before the Night Journey, which seems to contradict the different *ahādīth* about the start of the obligation of the five prayers during the Night Journey. Ibn Ishāq clearly mentions that prayer started after Khadijah embraced Islam; he mentions (2004, 180) that, at the beginning of the Prophethood, the Prophet and Khadijah used to pray secretly.

In addition, Ibn Ishāq quotes the companion ‘Abdullāh Ibn Mas‘ūd: “We could not pray beside the Ka‘bah except when ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb embraced Islam” (see Ibn Ishāq 2004, 225). It is known that ‘Umar converted to Islam in Makkah well before the Night Journey. He embraced Islam in the year 6 AB<sup>19</sup> / 615 CE (see al-Mubārapi 1996, 109), i.e. after the first Muslim migration to Abyssinia. This account shows that Muslims began praying early on, probably in the first year of the Prophethood of Muhammad.

It is mentioned in the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad that he used to pray towards *Bayt al-Maqdis*. Al-Bukhārī narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (2000, (1) 13):

Narrated by Al-Barā’ Ibn ‘Āzib: When the Prophet came to Madīnah, he stayed at the beginning in his grandfathers’ or maternal uncles’ home. They were from the *Anṣār* [the original residents of Madīnah]. He performed his prayers facing *Bayt al-Maqdis* for sixteen or seventeen months. Yet he wished that he could pray facing the Ka‘bah [in Makkah]. The first prayer which he performed facing the Ka‘bah was the *‘Aṣr* [afternoon] prayer, and he was accompanied by some people. Then, one of those who prayed with him [towards Makkah] passed near some people, in a mosque, bowing during their

<sup>18</sup> يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَزْمَلُ، قُمْ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

<sup>19</sup> AB = After *Bi’tḥab*: After the first revelation to Muhammad that marked the start of his Prophethood

prayers [facing *Bayt al-Maqdis*]. The man said: “I swear by God, I testify that I prayed with the Messenger of God facing Makkah”. Hearing that, those people changed their direction towards the Ka’bah immediately. In the meantime, Jews were first pleased to see the Prophet facing *Bayt al-Maqdis* in his prayers. Yet when he changed his prayer direction towards the Ka’bah, they refused that.<sup>20</sup>

In this *ḥadīth*, the narrator has doubts about the period during which the Prophet faced *Bayt al-Maqdis* in his prayer. The confusion here is between 16 and 17 months. Nevertheless, there are other narrations that specify the duration, such as that of al-Nasā’ī (2000, (1) 120), which specifies it as 16 months. However, it is known that Muslims started praying the five daily obligatory prayers after the Night Journey, which took place before the migration to Madīnah. Therefore, the question about the direction of prayer in Makkah, before the migration, should be answered.

Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal (1995, (3) 310) narrates:

Narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās: “Prophet Muhammad used to pray, while he was in Makkah, towards *Bayt Al-Maqdis*, putting the Ka’bah in front of him. He stayed [praying towards *Bayt al-Maqdis*] after his migration for sixteen months, then he was turned [by an order from God] towards the Ka’bah”.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear from this *ḥadīth* that the Prophet used to pray towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* when he was resident in Makkah. He used to pray towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* and face the Ka’bah at the same time. This means that he used to pray behind the southern corner of the Ka’bah, which is called *al-Rukn al-Yamani* (the Yemeni corner). This includes the time of the beginning of Prayer in Islam, the obligation of the five daily prayers that took place during the Night Journey, and 16 to 17 months after the migration to Madīnah.

Fadi Alrabi (2009, 18) argues that there is no evidence of any change of the *Qiblah* after the Night Journey (such a vital event would have been well-documented), and “it is most likely that the *Qiblah* before the Night Journey

عن البراء بن عازب أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان أول ما قدم المدينة نزل على أجداده أو قال أخواله 20 من الأنصار، وأنه صلى قِبَلَ بيت المقدس ستة عشر شهراً أو سبعة عشر شهراً وكان يعجبه أن تكون قِبَلته قِبَلَ البيت وأنه صلى أول صلاة صلاة العصر وصلى معه قوم فخرج رجل ممن صلى معه فمر على أهل مسجد وهم راكعون فقال أشهد بالله لقد صليت مع رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قِبَلَ مكة فداروا كما هم قِبَلَ البيت، وكانت اليهود قد أعجبهم إذ كان يصلي قِبَلَ بيت المقدس وأهل الكتاب فلما ولي وجهه قِبَلَ البيت أنكروا ذلك.

عن ابن عباس قال: (كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يصلي وهو بمكة نحو بيت المقدس والكعبة بين يديه، وبعد ما هاجر إلى المدينة ستة عشر شهراً، ثم صرف إلى الكعبة).

This *ḥadīth* is authentic as al-Haythamī (d. 707 AH / 1308 CE) mentions in *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id* (2001, (2) 88).

was just the same as it was after it". This means that praying towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* was the original act of the Muslims, since the start of prayer in Makkah. The author, therefore, concludes that the Prophet and Muslims of that time prayed towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* for more than 14 years. Of those 14 years, only about 16 months were in Madīnah, and the rest were in Makkah. In other words, the Prophet Muhammad in his lifetime prayed towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* more than he prayed towards Makkah.

The change of the *Qiblah* from *Bayt al-Maqdis* to Makkah took place through a Qur'ānic revelation in Madīnah. The Qur'ān refers to this change in 9 verses, namely verses 142-150 of Chapter 2 (*al-Baqarah*). Many exegetes elaborate on this issue in an attempt to answer the question of why the *Qiblah* was changed.

However, the author believes that this question should be reversed, i.e. why was the Prophet Muhammad ordered to pray towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* for more than 14 years? It is clear that the Prophet Muhammad was most likely ordered through a revelation to turn towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* in his prayer from the outset. This could be understood easily when reading the Qur'ānic text (...Yet We have not made the *Qiblah* that you were [facing during your prayer] [i.e. *Bayt al-Maqdis*] but to know who follows the Messenger and who turns over [i.e. disobeys]...) (Qur'an 2, 143). The Qur'ān attributes the order to pray towards *Bayt al-Maqdis* to God.

According to many Muslim sources, the Ka'bah was most likely the *Qiblah* of Abraham, who represents the point of reference of the Prophet Muhammad as the Qur'ān clarifies in many verses.<sup>22</sup> This is, probably, why the verses of

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<sup>22</sup> For example: "and follow the religion of Abraham [who was] *hanif*" واتبع ملة إبراهيم *hanif* (4:125). *Hanif* means the true pure monotheism, to believe in one God (see Khan 1996, 804). Other verses are mentioned in this context such as "and who rejects the religion of Abraham except for who fools himself" ومن يرغب عن ملة إبراهيم إلا من سفه (2:130), "Say: Nay, but [I choose] the religion of Abraham [who was] *hanif*, and he was not among the polytheists" قل بل ملة إبراهيم حنيفاً وما كان من المشركين (2:135), "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a *hanif*, Muslim, and he was not among the polytheists. Verily, the only [people] to have claim to Abraham are the ones who followed him [during his life], this Prophet [i.e. Muhammad] and the believers [i.e. the Muslims]" ما كان إبراهيم يهودياً ولا نصرانياً ولكن كان حنيفاً مسلماً وما كان من المشركين (3:67-68), "Say: God has said the truth, so follow the religion of Abraham [who was] *hanif*" قل صدق الله، فاتبعوا ملة *hanif* (3:95), "Say: Verily, My Lord has guided me to a straight path, a true religion, the religion of Abraham [who was] *hanif*, and he was not among the polytheists" قل إني هديني ربي إلى صراط مستقيم ديناً قيميا ملة إبراهيم حنيفاً وما كان من المشركين (6:161), "Then We revealed to you: Follow the religion of Abraham, [who was] *hanif*"