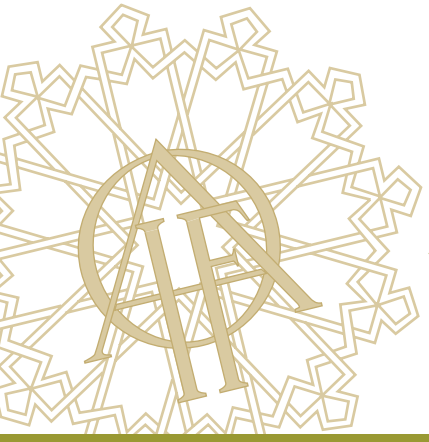

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Adam Bursi

On the Pattern of God's Throne: The Kaʿba as Paradise in the First Centuries of Islam

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On the Pattern of God's Throne

The Kaʿba as Paradise in the First Centuries of Islam

◆ ABSTRACT

This article suggests that the idea of the Kaʿba as a piece of Paradise on earth was a significant lens through which early Muslims understood this holy site. It highlights evidence that associations between the Kaʿba and Paradise were made already in the early Islamic period, likely going back to the early 2nd/8th century. The dating suggests a particular religio-political environment within which such ideas about the Kaʿba circulated: debates about the emerging Islamic sacred geography, and particularly the dialogue between Mecca and Jerusalem.

Keywords: Kaʿba, Paradise, Mecca, Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock

◆ RÉSUMÉ

Sur le motif du trône de Dieu : la Kaʿba comme paradis dans les premiers siècles de l'islam

Cet article suggère que l'idée de la Kaʿba comme un morceau de paradis sur terre était un prisme important à travers lequel les premiers musulmans perçurent ce site sacré. Il met en évidence des preuves selon lesquelles des associations entre la Kaʿba et le paradis furent faites dès le début de la période islamique, probablement dès le début du IIe/VIIIe siècle. Cette date

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suggère que c'est dans un environnement politico-religieux particulier que de telles idées sur la Kaʿba circulèrent : débats sur la géographie sacrée islamique émergente et, en particulier, dialogue entre La Mecque et Jérusalem.

Mots-clés : Kaʿba, paradis, La Mecque, Jérusalem, Dôme du Rocher

ملخص

على مثال عرش الله: الكعبة بوصفها الجنة في القرون الأولى للإسلام

تشير هذه المقالة إلى أن فكرة الكعبة كقطعة من الجنة على الأرض قد شكّلت بؤرة مهمة فهم من خلالها المسلمون الأوائل هذا المكان المقدس. وتُقدم أدلة على أن الربط بين الكعبة والجنة قد تأسس بالفعل في العصر الإسلامي المبكر، ويرجّح أن ذلك يعود إلى أوائل القرن الثاني الهجري/الثامن الميلادي. ويشير هذا التاريخ إلى أن تلك الأفكار عن الكعبة قد انتشرت في بيئة دينية-سياسية خاصة: المناقشات حول الجغرافيا المقدسة الإسلامية الناشئة، ولا سيّما الحوار بين مكة والقدس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكعبة، الجنة، مكة، القدس، قبة الصخرة

* * *

A variety of modern scholars have noted the difficulties of interpreting the *ḥağğ*. Discussing the canonical Islamic pilgrimage practices, William Graham writes that "the scholar is confronted with a series of ritual acts that elude comprehensive, rational systemization under one interpretive rubric".[1] William Roff similarly writes of the *ḥağğ* that "no adequate methodology has been devised for analysis of its import and meaning for historical Islam".[2] More recently, Marion Katz has noted that "the unyielding aniconicity and obscure purpose of most elements of the hajj do suggest an intentional rejection of both symbolism and ritual efficacy" and "seem to trace a spare geometry that defies conventional decoding".[3] Identifying a general trend in this regard, Shawkat Toorawa writes: "Modern scholarly analyses of the rituals of the hajj are very few in number, part of a larger inattention to the study of ritual and rituals in Islamic studies generally."[4]

1. Graham 1983, p. 56.
2. Roff 1985, p. 79.
3. Katz 2004, p. 100.
4. Toorawa 2015, p. 229.

Much like the pilgrimage rituals, the building that ostensibly stands at the *ḥaǧǧ*'s centre—the Kaʿba—has likewise tended to evade scholarly interpretation. In his recent monograph on the building, Simon O'Meara highlights the fact that "the Kaʿba has received little attention in architectural scholarship and barely figures in the many survey texts of Islamic art"[5] despite the huge body of Islamic devotional literature extolling its beauty and spiritual significance. Much scholarship tends to focus on reconstructing the Kaʿba's more "original" physical structure and ritual usage(s) in the pre-Islamic period, often with the implication that such data will impart a better understanding of the building's inherent, if not timeless, meaning for Muslims.

Such hesitancies and difficulties in interpreting the *ḥaǧǧ* and the Kaʿba are not solely phenomena of modern academia. Muslim jurists historically have often avoided ascribing definitive meaning to the *ḥaǧǧ* rituals and instead classified the rites as acts of obedience to God (*ʿibādāt*) whose meanings are unimportant and are likely ultimately unknowable by humans.[6] At the same time, these are not all-encompassing features of Islamic thought on these subjects. As M. Katz notes, though Muslims throughout history have deployed "no single mythic paradigm" in understanding the meaning(s) of the *ḥaǧǧ*, different individuals and groups have nonetheless drawn upon "a wealth of mythic motifs" in interpreting the pilgrimage and its rites.[7] Indeed, Christian Lange shows that alongside the "sober views" of the jurists, there were also "more imaginative interpretations, which are preserved in a variety of genres of Islamic literature", including in "texts commonly considered to be scholarly".[8]

Among these different values and interpretations, a particularly prominent theme in Islamic literature has been the symbolic and/or literal association of the *ḥaǧǧ*—and the Kaʿba especially—with Paradise. This theme has manifested in a variety of ways, across a wealth of literary genres. For example, narratives found in *ḥadīṯ* collections and other texts variously assert that the Kaʿba physically descended as a whole from Paradise; was constructed by the prophet Adam in Mecca immediately following his own descent from Paradise; and/or is a terrestrial reproduction of a building existing in the heavens. In a perhaps more "symbolic" reading of the connection between the *ḥaǧǧ* and Paradise, the early mystic Ḏū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. *c.*245/859–860) compares performing the *ḥaǧǧ* to witnessing the "stations of the Hereafter", with the Holy Mosque in Mecca said to be "like Paradise" (*ka-l-ǧanna*) and "the House *[the Kaʿba]* is like the throne of God, and its circumambulation is like the angels' circumambulation of the throne".[9] Such heavenly readings of the *ḥaǧǧ* and Kaʿba became frequent in mystical texts, including in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111).[10]

In this article, I highlight evidence that such associations between the Kaʿba and Paradise were made already in the early Islamic period, likely going back to the 2nd/8th century.

5. O'Meara 2020, p. 1.
6. Katz 2004, pp. 113 ff.; the author argues that it is only in the modern period that Muslim writers began to speak explicitly of the "symbolism" of *ḥaǧǧ* rites (pp. 125–126).
7. Katz 2004, p. 110.
8. Lange 2016, pp. 268–271.
9. Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, II, pp. 20–21 (cited in Lange 2016, p. 269).
10. Campo 1991, pp. 82–84; Katz 2004, pp. 121–124; Lange 2016, p. 269.

While this motif has long been noted in English-language scholarship,[11] here I am interested in demonstrating the antiquity of several traditions relevant to this theme. Rather than a conception that emerged only in later centuries, the Kaʿba's close connection with Paradise was an understanding of the building that some Muslims promoted from a quite early date. As I will argue, this dating of the material suggests a particular religio-political environment within which such ideas about the Kaʿba likely circulated throughout the early Muslim community: the discussions about the emerging Islamic sacred geography of the late 1st/7th and early 2nd/8th century.

1. A heavenly house for Adam on earth

The dating of literary material found in early Islamic texts is a long-debated field of study, with competing schools of thought regarding both methods and conclusions. Particular disagreement surrounds the reliability of *ḥadīṯ* texts as sources for the first Islamic centuries and how best to determine their contents' antiquity. Herbert Berg has summarised the situation as characterised by a "failing that scholars on both sides of this debate—both the sceptical and the sanguine—share: the results of their work is dictated by their presuppositions".[12] Due to basic epistemological differences in the interpretation of early Islamic sources, H. Berg concludes that "it is unlikely, therefore, that the impasse will be resolved".[13]

Despite this scholarly "impasse", traditions about the paradisical nature of the Kaʿba appear within several Islamic texts that are widely acknowledged to contain early material. Though certainly not definitive proof, the traditions' presence in these texts allows us to speak with a degree of confidence about the relative antiquity of these traditions.

A wealth of relevant traditions appears in the *Muṣannaf* of the *ḥadīṯ* collector ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/827), and a smaller number appear in the *Muṣannaf* of Abū Bakr b. Abī Šayba (d. 235/849). The *Muṣannaf*-s of ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Šayba both collect preclassical *ḥadīṯ* materials, including statements ascribed to Muslim scholars from the generation of the successors (*tābiʿūn*) of the late 1st/7th and early 2nd/8th century. These reports provide "a wealth of information about the alleged opinions of scholars in the generations after the Prophet's death",[14] and even so sceptical a scholar as Gualtherus Juynboll has suggested the "feasibility of the assumption" that this material "may in fact be historically ascribable to the 1st/7th century personalities under whose names this category of transmitted material is preserved".[15]

Offering evidence from a genre of early Islamic writing somewhat separate from these *ḥadīṯ* compilations, the *tafsīr* text ascribed to the exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767)

11. Wensinck 1916; Wheeler 2006, pp. 63–67, 85–86.
12. Berg 2000, p. 3.
13. Berg 2000, p. 4.
14. Katz 2002, p. 27.
15. Juynboll 1992, p. 300. See also Motzki 2002; Lucas 2008; Webb 2023a, pp. 35, 52. For a more sceptical perspective, see Gledhill 2012.

also includes a body of relevant early material about the Kaʿba. As Nicolai Sinai writes, the contents of Muqātil's *Tafsīr* indicate that his text offers a view into "a relatively primitive stage of Quranic exegesis" that "suggests a default dating of the work to the 2nd/8th century".[16] Given the particular features of the text, N. Sinai argues that "we can with some confidence accept the text's attribution to Muqātil and operate with a *terminus ante quem* of *c*.152/770 (it may well be considerably earlier)".[17]

Taken together, these texts collectively provide significant evidence of the circulation, by the 2nd/8th century, of paradisical traditions about the Kaʿba.[18] For example, in the section on the *ḥaǧǧ* (here called *kitāb al-manāsik*, the "book of pilgrimage rites") in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, several traditions link the Kaʿba's construction and ritual circumambulation with the descent from heaven of the first prophet and father of humanity, Adam. In the "Chapter on the construction of the Kaʿba" (*bāb bunyān al-Kaʿba*), a tradition is reported from ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. *c*.115/733) saying that, after Adam had been expelled from Paradise to earth, God made a ruby stone (*yāqūta*) descend from Paradise upon the spot where today the Kaʿba stands in Mecca; this stone continued to be circumambulated until it was raised at the time of the Flood.[19] In a similar report narrated by Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. 117/735), God says: "O Adam, I have brought down for you a house. Circumambulate it as my throne is circumambulated, and pray near it as my throne is prayed near."[20] At the end of this report, a comment is added from the transmitter Maʿmar b. Rāšid (d. 153/770), who says that Abān b. Abī ʿAyyāš (d. *c*.138/755–756) had reported to him that "the House descended as a single ruby or a single pearl *[durra]*".[21] In a different version reported by ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ, God instead commands Adam: "Build me a house, then go around it as you saw the angels go around my house in heaven."[22]

These reports place the origins of the Kaʿba and its circumambulation in Paradise, with a heavenly stone said to have descended as the original Adamic-era Kaʿba and with God's heavenly house or throne functioning as the model for how the Kaʿba is to be circumambulated. Ascribed by ʿAbd al-Razzāq to scholars like Maʿmar b. Rāšid and Ibn Ǧurayǧ (d. 150/767)—and by them to earlier scholars, including ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ and Qatāda b. Diʿāma—these traditions suggest that etiological stories about paradisical and Adamic associations with the Kaʿba and its worship were likely circulating by the mid-2nd/8th century.

16. Sinai 2014, p. 114.
17. Sinai 2014, p. 117.
18. In the footnotes, I provide references to parallels to these traditions as they appear in other relatively early texts.
19. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 91 (no. 9090). Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *History*, pp. 292–293; Kister 1993, p. 139.
20. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, pp. 93–94 (no. 9096). Cf. Ibn Abī ʿArūba, *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, pp. 70–71 (no. 26); al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 81–82 (no. 23); al-Ṭabarī, *History*, p. 293.
21. See al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, p. 78 (no. 18); al-Ṭabarī, *History*, pp. 301–302. On Abān, see Gleave 2015, p. 84.
22. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 92 (no. 9092). Cf. Ibn Isḥāq, *Kitāb al-Siyar*, p. 94; al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 72–73 (no. 11).

Further evidence for this dating appears in Ibn Abī Šayba's *Muṣannaf* and Muqātil's *Tafsīr*. Both texts include traditions indicating that the prophet Adam had performed aspects of the *ḥaǧǧ*, including (in Ibn Abī Šayba's case) his circumambulating the Kaʿba.[23] Ibn Abī Šayba's traditions also connect the Kaʿba's veneration to the heavenly angels, who are said to have been the first beings ever to have circumambulated the building, long before Adam did.[24] Based on these texts, it was likely already in the mid-2nd/8th century, if not even earlier, that Muslims were extending the Kaʿba's existence back to the time of Adam and connecting it to Paradise.

While the aforementioned traditions connect the Kaʿba's earthly origin to a model building in Paradise, some traditions further describe this paradisical prototype for the terrestrial Kaʿba. This notion is not explicitly described in the Quran, but Quran, LII, *al-Ṭūr*, 4, mentions *al-bayt al-maʿmūr*, a phrase commonly translated into English as "the visited house" or "the enlivened house". Many of the earliest exegetes understood this phrase as the name of a heavenly building that stood in some direct relationship with the earthly Kaʿba.[25] For example, Muqātil glosses the verse with the following words: "Its name is 'al-Ḍurāḥ'. It is in the fifth heaven, and it is said that it is in the earthly sky in the manner of the Kaʿba in breadth and location, though its length is like that between the earth and the sky."[26] The Quranic mention of *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* is thus interpreted as a building—also known as al-Ḍurāḥ, "the Distant"—existent in the fifth heaven and like the Kaʿba in breadth and location, though its length is far greater than that of its earthly counterpart.

A chapter on this subject appears in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, with several traditions similar to what is found in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*. In one, the Prophet Muḥammad says: "*al-bayt al-maʿmūr*, which is in the sky, is called 'al-Ḍurāḥ'. It is above the Sacred Mosque: if it fell, it would fall upon it."[27] Another report in this chapter finds the Ḫāriǧī figure ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Kawwāʾ (d. after 44/664) asking the caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: "*al-bayt al-maʿmūr*: what is it?"[28] ʿAlī answers: "That is al-Ḍurāḥ in the seventh heaven, in the throne *[fī-l-ʿarš]*."[29] Another report in the same chapter finds the companion of the Prophet and Šīʿī figure Abū al-Ṭufayl ʿĀmir b. Wāṯila (d. after 110/728–729) saying: "The House *[the Kaʿba]* is constructed on the pattern of God's throne. If *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* fell, it would fall upon it *[the Kaʿba]*. It is the centre of the earth, from which [the earth] was spread out."[30]

These texts place the Kaʿba in a direct relationship, of one kind or another, with a heavenly structure. The Kaʿba is said to be structurally similar to this heavenly building and to be patterned on God's throne, recalling the traditions that say the Kaʿba should be circumambulated as the angels circumambulate God's throne in Paradise. The Kaʿba is said to be spatially located

23. Ibn Abī Šayba, *Muṣannaf*, XIII, p. 54 (no. 36970); Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, III, p. 125 (cited in Webb 2023b, p. 37).
24. Ibn Abī Šayba, *Muṣannaf*, XIII, pp. 41, 62 (nos. 36913, 37014).
25. Wensinck 1916, pp. 48–50; Livne-Kafri 2008, pp. 62–64; Burge 2009; Neuwirth 2022b, p. 432.
26. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, IV, p. 143.
27. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 28 (no. 8874). Cf. al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, p. 91 (no. 36).
28. On Ibn al-Kawwāʾ, see Anthony 2012, pp. 32, 133; Hagemann 2021, pp. 86, 141–143.
29. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 29 (no. 8875). Cf. al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 92–93 (nos. 38, 40).
30. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 28 (no. 8873). On Abū al-Ṭufayl, see Van Ess 2017, pp. 338–340.

directly below this heavenly model, such that the heavenly version would land on the Kaʿba if it ever fell from the sky. The presence of these traditions in Muqātil's *Tafsīr* as well as in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* strongly suggests that such *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* material was in circulation by the 2nd/8th century.

2. The emergence of a paradisical and Adamic Kaʿba

Based on the textual evidence studied above, it appears that associations between the Kaʿba, Adam, and Paradise were likely made by the 2nd/8th century. These ideas about the Kaʿba's paradisical and Adamic history stand in contrast with other early traditions about the building, including those that appear in the Quran and in pre-Islamic literature. As Peter Webb has noted, "the Quran's historical horizon of the hajj is firmly fixed on Ibrahim with no reference to Adam".[31] Indeed, the Quran "inextricably intertwines hajj narratives with the story of Abraham":[32] a feature that is absent from pre-Islamic mentions of the Kaʿba, suggesting that this emphasis on Abraham is an "innovative discourse of the Quran to reveal the hajj's Abrahamic origins".[33] As for the paradisical parallel to the earthly Kaʿba, the Quran's enigmatic mention of *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* appears to be the earliest reference to such an idea, if a paradisical building is in fact the reference that is intended by the Quranic text.[34] The idea of the heavenly *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* thus appears to be a distinctly Islamic-era understanding of the Kaʿba, as does the idea of Adam's (and indeed Abraham's) connection to it.

Historians have offered varied reasons for the emergence of these traditions related to Adam, Paradise, and the Kaʿba. P. Webb has argued that 3rd-/9th- and 4th-/10th-century Muslim authors began to figure Adam as the Kaʿba's original constructor due to these writers' broadening horizons and diversifying audiences. As the Islamic community grew to encompass (and to be defined by) ethnic groups beyond Arabs, Muslim historians "bestowed timelessness to the hajj"[35] by extending its history from the time of the Arab progenitors Abraham and Ishmael back to that of the primordial man Adam. Noting the broadening geographic and historical viewpoints of 3rd-/9th- and 4th-/10th-century Muslim authors, who in these centuries "began to write universal histories of the world" for "more diverse audiences",[36] P. Webb offers a compelling social explanation for the increasing narrative emphasis on Adam.

Approaching this issue from a different perspective, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh suggests that connecting the Kaʿba with Adam and Paradise was a component of the "Islamisation" of the *ḥaǧǧ*

31. Webb 2013, p. 7.
32. Webb 2023b, p. 29.
33. Webb 2023a, p. 58.
34. Neither the phrase *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* nor a conception of a heavenly parallel building appears (to my knowledge) in pre-Islamic poetry that mentions the Kaʿba. See Webb 2023a. Angelika Neuwirth (2022b, p. 432) argues that the Quranic mention of *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* simply refers to the Kaʿba itself and that "the traditional interpretation that refers to the heavenly Jerusalem [*sic*] [...] is not supported by the text".
35. Webb 2013, p. 12. See also Webb 2023b, p. 38.
36. Webb 2013, p. 12.

in the early Islamic centuries. As Muslims fought to repel "the survivals of pre-Islamic culture" and "natural, pagan trends", they worked to place the *ḥaǧǧ*'s origins firmly within monotheistic history rather than the pre-Islamic pagan past.[37] Connecting the building's ancient construction and worship with the scriptural figure Adam and with the monotheistic conception of Paradise were ways of mythologically accomplishing this task. While she does not offer a firm dating for these narrative efforts, H. Lazarus-Yafeh notes that some traditions appear "as early as the 9th century".[38]

Both P. Webb and H. Lazarus-Yafeh thus offer intriguing suggestions regarding the historiographic movement toward Adam as the original constructor of the Kaʿba. Yet, as we have seen, this narrative development is in fact already present in quite early sources, some of which directly address the tension between the stories of Adam and Abraham as the Kaʿba's builder. In the "Chapter on the construction of the Kaʿba" in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ's tradition about the heavenly stone sent down for Adam notes that the stone was subsequently raised at the time of the Flood, leading God to later send Abraham to build the House as related in the Quran.[39] Maʿmar b. Rāšid similarly comments that God raised the House at the time of the Flood, but the building's foundations (*asās*) remained, enabling Abraham to then re-found the building.[40] In another tradition from ʿAṭāʾ, after Adam is commanded to build the House in Mecca, it is simply said that "this was Adam's building, then Abraham built it".[41] A degree of tension between the roles of Adam and Abraham appears here, with an effort made by the narrators to allow both men to be the building's founder. There is an awareness of conflicting traditions, with the Quranic evidence of Abraham's Kaʿba added somewhat inelegantly to the stories of Adam.

While the narratives of Adam's connection to the Kaʿba appear to have emerged later than the Quranic story of the building's Abrahamic origins, this development did not occur only in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, as P. Webb has suggested.[42] Instead, the literary evidence surveyed above indicates that traditions of the Kaʿba's Adamic and paradisical associations were already known in the 2nd/8th century. If we look for a historical explanation for these traditions' circulation in this specific time period, what might we suggest? Rather than seeing these as general "Islamicising" historiographic developments, as H. Lazarus-Yafeh does, I instead argue that we should understand these traditions about the Kaʿba in the context of the competition over and between sacred spaces in the early Islamic world. More specifically, I interpret these traditions against the backdrop of the intra-Muslim dialogue regarding the holiness of Mecca and Jerusalem, and the Kaʿba and the Dome of the Rock, in the 2nd/8th century.

37. Lazarus-Yafeh 1981, pp. 19, 30–32.
38. Lazarus-Yafeh 1981, p. 31.
39. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 91 (no. 9090).
40. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 94 (no. 9096).
41. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 92 (no. 9092).
42. The author offers a more nuanced dating of this material in Webb 2023a, p. 58; 2023b, p. 37.

3. A dialogue of heavenly sites

The question of Jerusalem's sanctity to Muslims is a complex topic that goes back to the origins of Islam. Tensions regarding the emergent Islamic sacred geography—and its connection to formative Islamic identity—already appear in the story of the Prophet Muḥammad's transfer of the nascent Muslim community's direction of prayer (*qibla*) from Jerusalem to Mecca, usually dated to the second year of the Hijra (623 CE).[43] While this etiological story suggests the earliest Muslims' abandonment of Jerusalem and adoption of Mecca as their sacred centre, recent scholarship has argued that Jerusalem was a more significant sacred site for Muslims—and for a longer period of time—than has been traditionally thought.[44] Rather than being replaced by Mecca during the Prophet's lifetime, Jerusalem was treated as an important holy site by many early Muslims. Indeed, it appears that Jerusalem and Mecca were variant and sometimes competing holy centres in the early Islamic centuries.

Though Uri Rubin has argued that "the competition over which is holier, Jerusalem or Mecca, […] has its roots in the Quran",[45] consensus has focused on the Umayyad era as the crucial period for this geographic dialogue. It is in this period that we see early Muslims' most material forms of sanctification of Jerusalem, with the Umayyad dynasty's construction of several monuments in the city, including the Dome of the Rock built around the Foundation Stone (Ṣaḫra) on the Temple Mount. As Heba Mostafa writes, "Muslim treatment of the Temple Mount suggests early recognition of Jerusalem's—and specifically the Rock's—sanctity".[46] The sanctity of this space was heightened by the ritualisation of the Dome of the Rock, which was provided with servants to maintain it and to carry out the elaborate incensing and perfuming of the site that was part of its preparation for visitation.[47]

Alongside this building activity and ritualisation of sites, early Muslims' sanctification of Jerusalem also manifested in their absorption and adaptation of biblical and post-biblical Jewish and Christian lore about the city, and especially about the Foundation Stone on the Temple Mount. This material is displayed in Islamic form in the "merits of Jerusalem" (*faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis*) traditions, many of which appear to have emerged in the late 1st/7th and early 2nd/8th century, as argued by Meir Kister, Amikam Elad, and others.[48] While the extant book-length collections of "merits of Jerusalem" traditions date from the 5th/11th century, these collections rely upon earlier texts, which themselves collected oral traditions that seemingly

43. O'Meara 2020, pp. 19–22; Patel 2022, pp. 29–41; Neuwirth 2022a. This event is traditionally associated with the revelation of Quran, II, *al-Baqara*, 142–144. On the different dates given for the movement of the *qibla*, see Rubin 1986, p. 103.
44. Shoemaker 2012, pp. 218–257.
45. Rubin 2023, p. 1.
46. Mostafa 2022, p. 61.
47. Raby 1999; Mostafa 2022.
48. Kister 1981; Elad 1995, pp. 11–22; Mourad 2008, p. 90; 2021b, p. 403; Shoemaker 2012, p. 231; George 2018, p. 46.

circulated from a quite early date.[49] Indeed, several such traditions already appear in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*, suggesting "that they were written down, widespread and well known by the second half of the 8th century, and that it is possible to attribute them as early as the beginnings of the second half of the 1st century after the Hijra",[50] i.e. the second half of the 7th century.

These traditions celebrate Jerusalem—and often the Foundation Stone specifically—as an especially holy site with direct connection to Paradise and the divine. For example, Adam is said to have bowed his head onto the Foundation Stone shortly after his descent from Paradise and later to have been buried near the Foundation Stone after his death.[51] The Foundation Stone itself is said to be "one of the stones of Paradise",[52] and one tradition directly states that "the Foundation Stone is from Paradise and is the navel of the earth".[53] Jerusalem as a whole is said to exist in close proximity to Paradise, and the Foundation Stone's terrestrial location is likewise geographically connected to Paradise. One tradition, for example, states that "if a rock fell from [Paradise], then it would fall upon the Foundation Stone".[54]

In many cases, these traditions about the Foundation Stone's Adamic and paradisical connections quite closely parallel the traditions about the Kaʿba studied above. As he did at the Kaʿba, Adam is said to have worshipped at the Foundation Stone soon after his descent to earth.[55] Like the Kaʿba, the Foundation Stone is itself said to be a heavenly stone descended from Paradise. Much as the Kaʿba is geographically located directly under the heavenly *al-bayt al-maʿmūr*, the Foundation Stone is said to be located directly below Paradise, such that a rock might fall from Paradise directly onto it. Given these strong parallels, it likely appears that the traditions about the Kaʿba stood in direct dialogue with the "merits of Jerusalem" traditions about the Foundation Stone's Adamic past and heavenly features.

Indeed, a major component of the interaction between the two sites appears to have been the translation of traditions about the Foundation Stone to the Kaʿba in celebrating the latter's holiness.[56] This is exemplified in the differing traditions that identify the Foundation Stone and the Kaʿba, respectively, as the site for the beginning of creation. The idea of the earth spreading out from the Temple Mount occurs in several pre-Islamic Jewish sources; similar themes about the site were adopted in Islamic texts, such as the description of the Foundation Stone as "the navel of the earth".[57] For example, Muqātil's *Tafsīr* includes the tradition that "the

49. Mourad 2021a, p. 267.

50. Hasson 1996, p. 365.

51. Ibn al-Muraǧǧā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, p. 114 (no. 134); al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, p. 77 (nos. 125–127); Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 68.

52. Al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, p. 78 (no. 128); Ibn al-Muraǧǧā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, p. 102 (no. 105); Livne-Kafri 2008, pp. 56–57.

53. Ibn al-Muraǧǧā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, p. 147 (no. 184); Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 47.

54. Ibn al-Muraǧǧā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, p. 103 (no. 107); Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 63.

55. It appears that only later texts assert that Adam himself actually built a place of worship on the Temple Mount; see Livne-Kafri 2008, pp. 69–70.

56. Wensinck 1916, pp. xii, 14, 18, 22, 49; Busse 1988; Van Ess 1992, p. 100; Livne-Kafri 2008, pp. 48, 54, 71.

57. Van Ess 1992, p. 95; Alexander 1997; Livne-Kafri 2008; Mourad 2008, pp. 93–94; Koltun-Fromm 2017; Rubin 2023, pp. 26–28. For a different interpretation of this material, see O'Meara 2020, pp. 47–49.

Rock in Jerusalem is the centre of the whole world".[58] At some point, Muslims appear to have "transferred" these ideas from the Foundation Stone to the Kaʿba.[59] We saw this in a tradition above, where the Kaʿba was connected to the site of creation and was said to be "the centre of the earth, from which it was spread out". A tradition in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* ascribes a similar statement to the legendary Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār: "The House was froth over the water for forty years before the earth was created. The earth was spread out from it."[60] Likewise, Muqātil says that "all the earth was spread out from beneath the Kaʿba".[61]

The traditions highlighting the paradisical and Adamic associations of the Kaʿba likely emerged (or began to circulate widely, at least) in the historical context of Mecca's dialogue with the sacred city of Jerusalem. Extending the Kaʿba's origins backwards in time from the prophet Abraham to the first man Adam—beyond highlighting the building's paradisical and scriptural connections—served useful rhetorical purposes in mythologically sacralising the site in comparison to the very similar themes surrounding the Foundation Stone in Jerusalem. While we cannot know the ultimate origins of these traditions associating the Kaʿba with Adam and Paradise, we can plausibly situate their early transmission in the first half of the 2nd/8th century, in the midst of intra-Muslim debates and discussions about sacred spaces.

4. The politics of Paradise traditions

The promotion of one city and shrine over others is sometimes assumed to have sprung from early Muslims' "local patriotism" or "local pride", with individuals favouring their respective territories over other regions.[62] Yet in studying a comparable debate over sacred geography from the early Islamic period, Harry Munt has argued that "there is no clear line […] between Medinans and non-Medinans when it comes to the promotion of the town's sanctity, its holy sites and pilgrimage to them".[63] Rather than only locally, the promotion of Medinan sanctity was spread among Muslims in different areas of the caliphate and was motivated by factors that often had little to do with "local pride". Indeed, as M. Kister notes, these rivalries between different sites were "often prompted by political struggles in the Muslim empire, by ethnic rivalry and by the contests between the religious factions".[64] This complex picture appears to have also characterised the motivations for those who spread traditions about the Kaʿba's paradisical history.

A notable case is found with ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ: an important Meccan scholar and ritual expert on the *ḥaǧǧ*, whose traditions about the Kaʿba we have encountered above. In different

58. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, II, p. 513; Hasson 1996, p. 383; Rubin 2023, p. 27.
59. Wensinck 1916, p. 18; Van Ess 1992, p. 100; Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 48; Rubin 2023, p. 178.
60. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 95 (no. 9098). Cf. al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, p. 66 (no. 1); O'Meara 2020, p. 47.
61. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, I, p. 575; Wensinck 1916, p. 38; Livne-Kafri 2008, pp. 50–51; Rubin 2023, p. 179.
62. See Hasson 1996, pp. 361–362.
63. Munt 2014, p. 160.
64. Kister 1996, p. 31.

sources, ʿAṭāʾ appears as a promoter of worship in Mecca and a critic of Muslims' ritual visitation of other sites. His opinion on the superiority of worship in Mecca over Medina appears in several reports, as does his criticism of visiting Jerusalem.[65] Thus, when asked by his student Ibn Ǧurayǧ about someone who had vowed to walk from Iraq to Jerusalem, ʿAṭāʾ reportedly responded: "You were commanded [by God to come to] this House *[the Kaʿba]*, so walk to this House."[66] In a report about the famous *ḥadīṯ* in which the Prophet Muḥammad commands his followers not to travel to any mosques except for the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and the Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem, Ibn Ǧurayǧ notes that "ʿAṭāʾ used to deny al-Aqṣā, then he reverted and added it with the others".[67] It appears ʿAṭāʾ begrudgingly accepted the Jerusalem mosque into the list of sacred spaces authorised by the Prophet.

Given his apparent opposition to the visitation of Jerusalem's holy sites and his explicit preference for Mecca's House over the shrine in Jerusalem, it is quite plausible that ʿAṭāʾ would circulate traditions about Mecca's ancient paradisical history. Indeed, these traditions suggest ʿAṭāʾ's intimate familiarity with the conflict between the sites and his strong personal interest in promoting Mecca over Jerusalem. Notably, ʿAṭāʾ also appears in "merits of Jerusalem" texts as the transmitter of a *ḥadīṯ* in which the Prophet Muḥammad reports that God had created and hallowed Mecca before creating Medina and then Jerusalem.[68] As U. Rubin notes, in this tradition Jerusalem has been "downgraded to third place in the order of creation".[69]

Another Meccan authority was the long-lived companion Abū al-Ṭufayl, whom we saw above quoted about *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* and the Kaʿba's place as the centre of the earth. We do not possess the wealth of traditions documenting Abū al-Ṭufayl's positions on the value of Muslim worship in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem that we have for ʿAṭāʾ. However, Abū al-Ṭufayl is also credited in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* and elsewhere with transmitting a report (attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib) that praises the wadis in Mecca and in India where Adam is said to have alighted immediately after his descent from Paradise[70] as well as a report about the Quraysh's construction of the Kaʿba in the period before the Prophet's emergence.[71] It appears Abū al-Ṭufayl was interested in the pre-Islamic history of the Kaʿba, with Meccan sites more generally, and perhaps with these sites' connections to Paradise.

Other than ʿAṭāʾ and Abū al-Ṭufayl, the rest of those who allegedly reported traditions about the Kaʿba's paradisical history were largely active outside of the Ḥiǧāz. Notably, this

65. Kister 1969, pp. 187–188; Munt 2014, pp. 105, 128.
66. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, VIII, p. 454; Kister 1969, p. 179.
67. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 133 (no. 9160). On this *ḥadīṯ*, see Kister 1969; Elad 1995, pp. 147–157; Lecker 1996, pp. 41–48.
68. Al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, p. 16 (no. 18); Ibn al-Muraǧǧā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, p. 10 (no. 2); Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 51; Rubin 2023, pp. 179–180.
69. Rubin 2023, p. 180.
70. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 116 (no. 9118); al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 560–561 (no. 662); al-Fākihī, *Aḫbār Makka*, II, p. 43 (no. 1110).
71. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, p. 102 (no. 9106); al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 239–240 (no. 174).

suggests that such traditions circulated widely from a fairly early date and were not restricted to the region of Mecca. While even ʿAṭāʾ and Abū al-Ṭufayl were almost certainly motivated by more complex reasons than their own proximity to Mecca, the non-Meccan scholars could not have transmitted these traditions about the Kaʿba because of local patriotism.

In some cases, we might speculate that sectarian opposition to Umayyad Jerusalem was a factor in circulating such traditions about the Kaʿba. Abū al-Ṭufayl was a Šīʿī partisan, as was the Iraqi Abān b. Abī ʿAyyāš, who was credited with saying that "the House descended as a single ruby or a single pearl". Though Šīʿī texts present varied perspectives on the sacrality of Jerusalem, a distinct strain of thought within their early sources diminishes the importance of Jerusalem as a sacred site.[72] As Ofer Livne-Kafri writes, "the rivalry with the Umayyads, who had an interest in elevating the status of Jerusalem, most probably added a certain dimension of antagonism".[73] Traditions celebrating the Kaʿba's paradisical origins may have been appealing to Šīʿī transmitters when traditions were circulating about the sanctity of Jerusalem. Notably, Abān is also credited with transmitting a report from Kaʿb al-Aḥbār saying that the Black Stone (*al-ḥağar al-aswad*) on the Kaʿba was "one of the flintstones of Paradise" (*marwatun min marw al-ğanna*).[74] Given the circulation of similar traditions about the Foundation Stone in Jerusalem being "one of the stones of Paradise", those opposed to Jerusalem's sanctity may have revelled in traditions that instead ascribed such paradisical features to the Kaʿba.

The remaining transmitters offer a more complicated picture of the sanctification of these different places in the early Islamic centuries. In these cases, individuals are credited with traditions that alternately praise Mecca and Jerusalem: that is to say, both sites are asserted to be holy. Qatāda b. Diʿāma—a prominent Baṣran scholar and storyteller (*qāṣṣ*), who was credited with a tradition about the Kaʿba's heavenly origins—is also credited with several traditions in praise of the sacred sites in Jerusalem.[75] This included a narrative in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* about Solomon's construction of the Israelite Temple on the Temple Mount[76] as well as traditions in "merits of Jerusalem" collections that laud the holiness of the Foundation Stone.[77] Similarly, Muqātil b. Sulaymān's *Tafsīr* includes passages on the Kaʿba's paradisical nature as well as a body of traditions in praise of Jerusalem, including traditions about the Foundation Stone specifically.[78]

In this regard, it is worth noting that both Qatāda and Muqātil were reported to have been on friendly terms with members of the ruling Umayyad house.[79] It may not have been entirely coincidental that these men circulated traditions praising Jerusalem and the Foundation Stone at a time when, as A. Elad writes, "the Umayyads intended to develop Jerusalem into both

72. Livne-Kafri 2001; Friedman 2013.
73. Livne-Kafri 2001, p. 119.
74. Al-Azraqī, *Aḫbār Makka*, pp. 455–456 (no. 443).
75. On Qatāda as a *qāṣṣ*, see Armstrong 2017, p. 302.
76. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, V, pp. 426–428 (no. 9753).
77. Al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, pp. 72, 89 (nos. 117, 144).
78. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, II, pp. 513–515; Hasson 1996, pp. 383–385; Rubin 2023, p. 5.
79. Armstrong 2017, pp. 126, 259–260, 270–271, 302, 310; Tayyara 2020, p. 123.

a political and religious centre which, if not intended to surpass Mecca, would at least be its equal".[80] As Suleiman Mourad notes, a number of preachers and scholars were "employed by the Umayyads", and "it is not farfetched that the Umayyads themselves could have had a hand in developing and shaping some of [the] features"[81] of the traditions in praise of Jerusalem. The Umayyads' patronage of, and influence on, the recording and transmission of similar kinds of materials—including, allegedly, their promotion of a prophetic *ḥadīṯ* encouraging pilgrimage to Jerusalem—was not unknown.[82]

Yet if the traditions ascribed to them are any indication, Muslim thinkers like Qatāda and Muqātil seemingly found the sacralisation of both the Meccan and Jerusalemite shrines to be entirely compatible. Rather than a winner-take-all competition between the Kaʿba and the Dome of the Rock, these traditions indicate efforts to praise them both. In fact, a variety of literary evidence suggests that in the early 2nd/8th century "Mecca and Jerusalem were indeed placed on the same level of importance".[83] For example, the Umayyad panegyrist al-Farazdaq (d. *c.*110/728–729) writes in a poem: "We are the possessors of two houses: the House of God and a revered house on the height of Aelia."[84] Seemingly referencing the Kaʿba in Mecca and the Dome of the Rock atop the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the poet here praises the Umayyads' control of both sacred sites, with respect accorded to both. It is perhaps within this context that we can understand the traditions of Qatāda and Muqātil that praise the paradisical sites in both Mecca and Jerusalem.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that several traditions about the Kaʿba's Adamic and paradisical origins began to circulate in the 2nd/8th century and likely emerged in dialogue with similar traditions from this period about the Foundation Stone in Jerusalem. While competition between these sites existed—and may have spurred the creation and/or circulation of these traditions—early sources also evidence an effort to draw the two of them together. As O. Livne-Kafri writes, "the parallel systems of Mecca and Jerusalem reflect an attempt to elicit identical holy elements".[85] The assertion of the comparably paradisical nature of both sites seems to be one example of these "parallel systems" in which both the Kaʿba and the Foundation Stone were understood as pieces of heaven on earth.

In some traditions, Mecca and Jerusalem are drawn together not only symbolically but even physically. It is reported that, at the time of the apocalyptic hour (*al-sāʿa*), the Kaʿba will "return", "visit", or "be gathered to" the Foundation Stone, with its pilgrims suspended beneath

80. Elad 1995, p. 160.
81. Mourad 2021b, p. 403.
82. Anthony 2020, pp. 86–101, 129–150; Borrut 2023, pp. 32–52.
83. Elad 1995, p. 157.
84. Kister 1969, p. 182; Jamil 1999, p. 56; Rubin 2023, p. 195.
85. Livne-Kafri 2008, p. 71.

the House as it travels to Jerusalem.[86] These traditions thus suggest that the Kaʿba itself will make a sort of final pilgrimage to the Foundation Stone, which early Islamic traditions closely associate with different apocalyptic scenarios, including the final gathering of humanity and creation there on the Day of Judgement.[87]

In one version of these apocalyptic traditions, the Kaʿba makes an additional eschatological movement after its relocation to Jerusalem. Ascribed to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, this tradition states that al-Bayt al-Ḥarām (the Kaʿba specifically or perhaps Mecca collectively?) will come to al-Bayt al-Maqdis (the city as a whole or the Temple Mount specifically?), and then "the two will be led to Paradise" (*yanqādān ilā al-ǧanna*) along with their people.[88] According to this tradition, the two holy sites will be joined with each other before finally being reunited with their shared place of origin: Paradise.

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