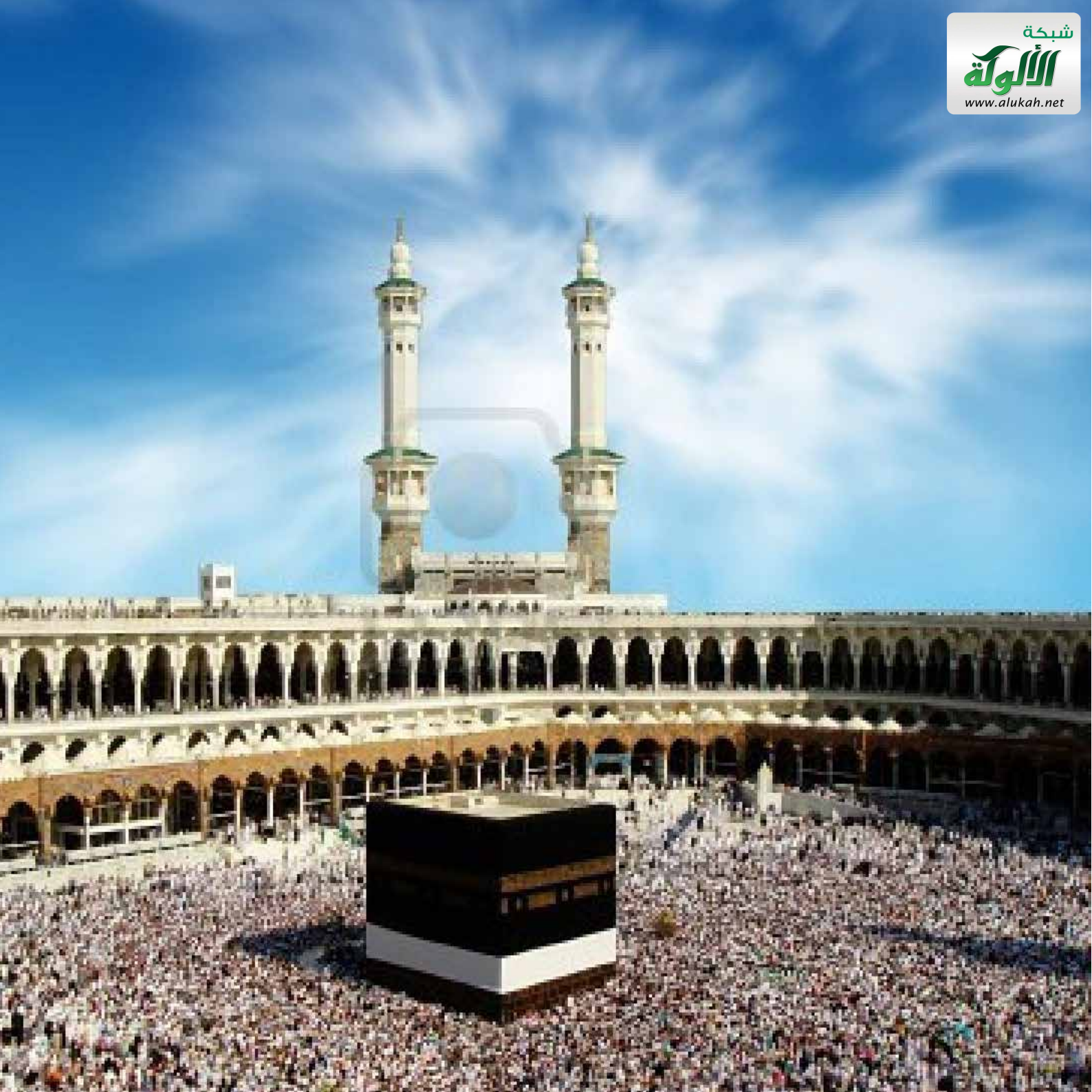


**Description
of the
Ka'ba and
its names**

By

Mahmūd Ibn Ahmad al Dosary (PhD).



Description of the Ka'ba and its names

This chapter is divided into two sections:

Section I: Description of the Ka'ba.

Section II: The names of the Ka'ba.

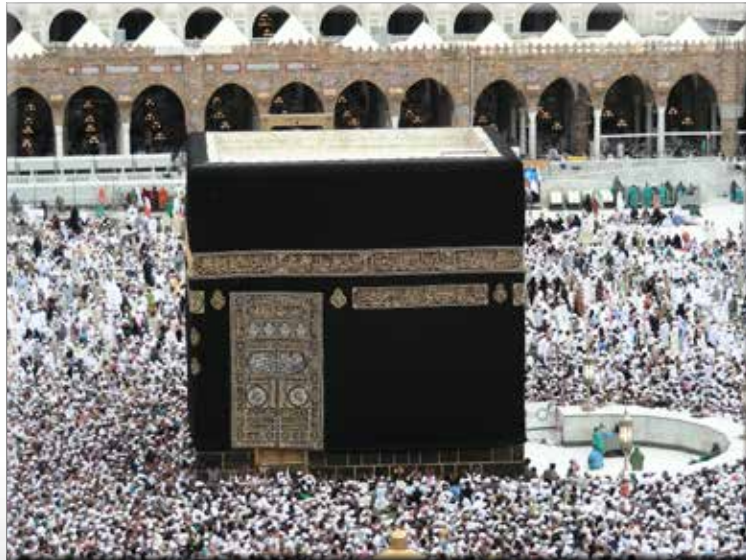


Section I

Description of the Ka'ba

Definition:

The Ka'ba is the House of Allah Most High; it is located in the centre of the Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Harām). It is a cuboid-shaped house with a roof and asymmetrical walls: the width of the wall of its door is 11.68 metres, the wall on the side of the Hġjr measures 9.9 metres, the wall between the Levantine Corner and the Yemeni Corner 12.04 metres and the wall between the Black Stone Corner and the Yemeni Corner 10.18 metres. The Ka'ba is 14 metres high and at its base covers an area of 145 square metres.⁽¹⁾



The Ka'ba is quoted in the Noble Qur'ān twice:

The first time: His word Most High: "Allah has made the Ka'ba, the Sacred House, standing for the people" (Surat al-Mā'ida – The Table Spread: verse 97).

﴿جَعَلَ اللَّهُ الْكَعْبَةَ الْبَيْتَ الْحَرَامَ قِيَمًا لِّلنَّاسِ﴾

The second time: "as an offering (to Allah) delivered to the Ka'ba" (Surat al-Mā'ida – The Table Spread: verse 95).

﴿هَدِيًّا بَلِغَ الْكَعْبَةِ﴾

Origin of the name:

There are two opinions concerning the origin of the name:

The first derives from **the height of the Ka'ba, its relief and prominence.**

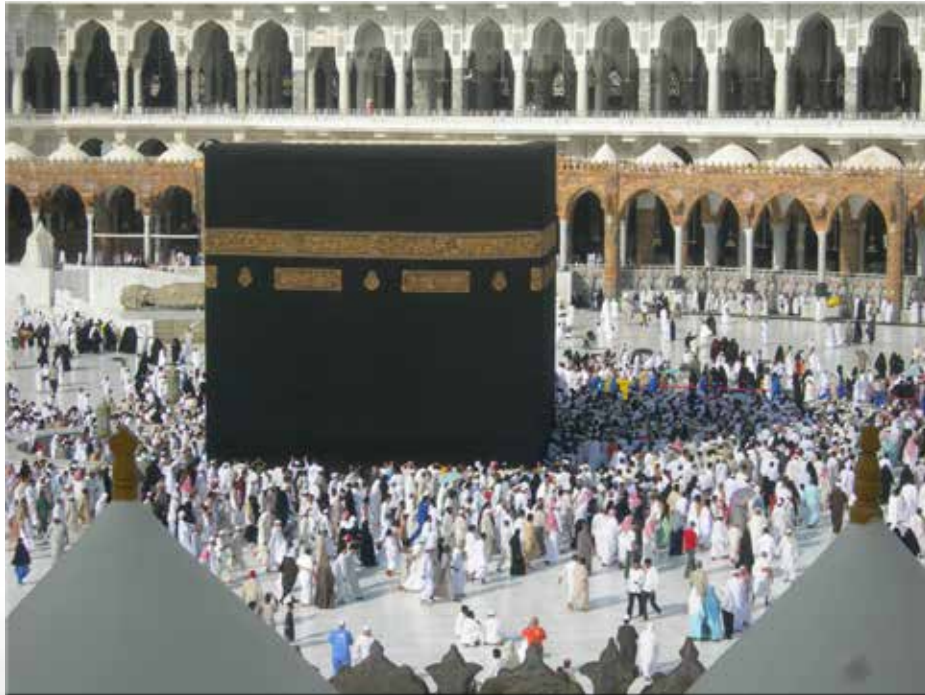
It was said about the breast of a woman *ku'iba* when it appears or soars upward; this is the opinion of the majority. Furthermore, every prominence in Arabic is *ka'b* may it be round or not,



for instance the heel of the foot *ka'b al-qadam*.⁽²⁾

The second derives from **the cuboid shape of its construction**, in other words it is **squared**, and this is the opinion of Mujāhid. To the Arabs, every quadrilateral is called *ka'ba*. *Tak'īb* in Arabic means giving a cuboid shape, like *tarbī'*: making square. Most houses in Arabia were round not squared.⁽³⁾

The first opinion is more correct for two reasons:



1. From a linguistic perspective, *ka'ba* is the prominent bone at the crossing of the leg and the foot.⁽⁴⁾
2. For the geometrical section of the architecture of the Ka'ba. As underlined by modern studies, it has a trapezoid shape of different sides. It is a rarely used form of architecture in construction. **Therefore**, the cause of the denomination of the Honourable Ka'ba goes back to its embossed prominence, not its cuboid shape.⁽⁵⁾

The corners of the Ka'ba:

The great Ka'ba has **four famous corners**; all of them originally oriented towards the four points of the compass with a slight deviation on the right:

On the North: the Iraqi Corner. **On the South:** the Yemeni Corner. **On the East:** the Black Stone Corner. **On the West:** the Levantine Corner.

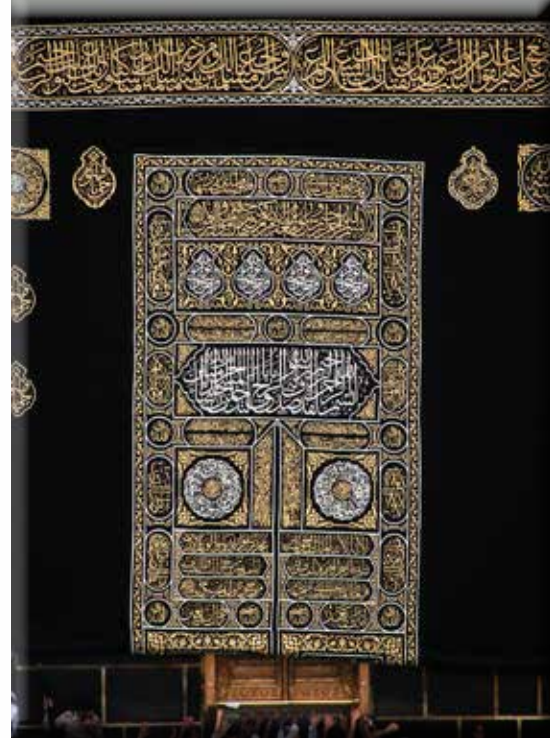
An-Nawawī (m) said: Know that the House has four corners: the Black Stone Corner and the Yemeni Corner. Both of them are called the two Yemeni corners. The



two other corners are called the two Levantine corners. **The Black Stone Corner** has two virtues: it is built on the foundations laid by Ibrāhīm (p) and it is endowed with the Black Stone.

The Yemeni Corner itself has one virtue: it is built on the foundations laid by Ibrāhīm (p).

The two other corners have no virtues linked with the two quoted above. For this, the Black Stone is singling itself out regarding two points; the touching and the kissing, for its two virtues. The Yemeni Corner is only touched, not kissed, as it has only one virtue. And for the two other corners, they are neither touched nor kissed.⁽⁶⁾





Section II

The names of the Ka'ba

The Honourable Ka'ba has plenty of names. Many of its names underline its nobility.

Among its names are the following:

First: The House (al-Bayt):

This term appears in the Holy Qur'ān 15 times⁽⁷⁾, sometimes **alone**, sometimes with a **pronoun** that designates Allah Most High⁽⁸⁾ and sometimes with a **qualifying adjective** (sacred, holy, old)⁽⁹⁾; for instance:

a. The House:

The term “House” designating the Ka'ba appears in the words of Allah Most High as in the verse:

﴿إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا

وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾



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

It has been named “House” for it has a roof and walls, the attributes of a house, even if there is no resident inside.⁽¹⁰⁾

b. A House with a pronoun:

The term “House” used with a pronoun designating Allah Most High appears 3 times in the Qur’ān:

1. “Purify My House” Surat al-Baqara – The Cow: 125.

﴿طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ﴾

2. “And purify My House” Surat al-Hajj – The Pilgrimage: 26.

﴿وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ﴾



3. "Near Your Sacred House" Surat
Ibrāhīm: 37.

﴿عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ﴾

Ibn 'Aṭīya (m) disclosed the secret of this addition of a pronoun saying: Allah linked the House to Himself, glorifying henceforth the House, and it is the link of something created to the Creator, or the bond between a possession and its owner.⁽¹¹⁾

**c. The Sacred House (al-Bayt
al-Ḥarām):**

The House has been described as sacred (ḥarām) in two verses of the noble Qur'ān:

1. "those coming to the Sacred House" Surat al-Mā'ida – The Table Spread, verse 2.

﴿ءَأَمِّينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامِ﴾



2. "Allah has made the Ka'ba, the Sacred House" Surat al-Mā'ida – The Table Spread, verse 97.

﴿جَعَلَ اللَّهُ الْكَعْبَةَ الْيَتَّى الْحَرَامِ﴾

Ḥarām is a noun meaning *muḥarram*: forbidden, inviolable. As-Sinjāri (m) said: The Ka'ba has many names, among them: the Sacred House; because Allah Most High made it sacred and glorified it, and the purpose of praising it is to exalt the whole Sanctuary (ḥaram).⁽¹²⁾

d. The Sacred House (al-Bayt al-Muḥarram):

Ibrāhīm (p) said in the Holy Qur'ān:

﴿رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ

عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ﴾

"O! Our Lord, I have settled some



of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House” Surat Ibrāhīm verse 37.

The House is described as *muḥarram* a past participle bearing the same semantic meaning of the word *al-ḥarām* i.e. sacred.

The difference between the two descriptions:

1. The House described as *muḥarram*, past participle, means that it has been made sacred, or it acquired sacredness, it became sacred, it was not all the time sacred.
2. The use of the word *al-ḥarām* means that the House has become sanctified, it is established as a matter of fact and it continues to be sacred, without taking notice of the time

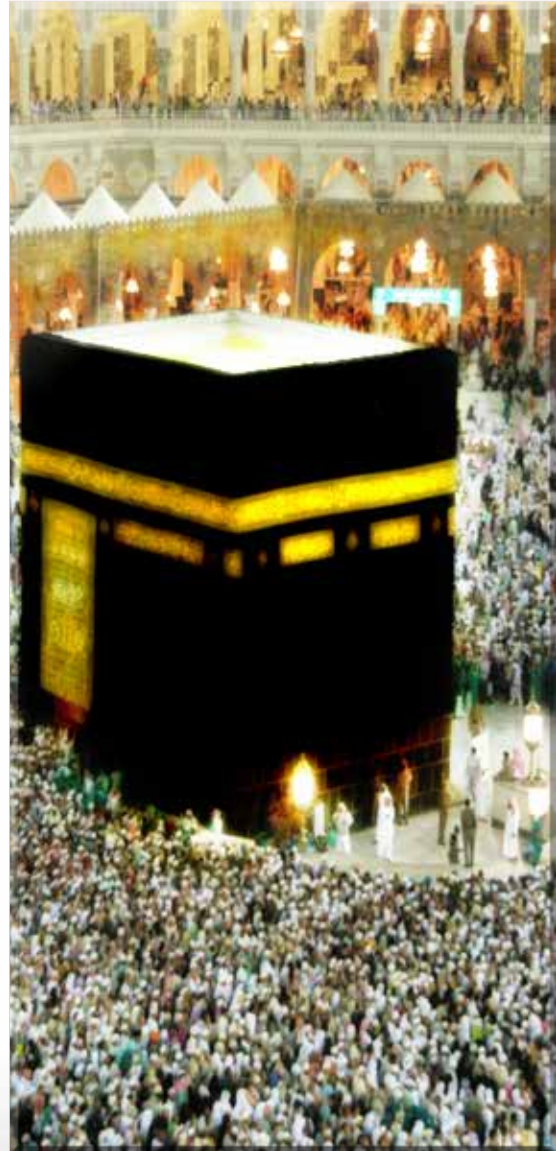


it became sacred. The stress is put on the constancy and continuity.⁽¹³⁾

The reason for the use of the word *muḥarram* is because Allah Most High forbade the disrespect or neglect of the Ka'ba, and He made its surroundings sacred as a place; **or because** it has always been respected with awe by the powerful as a sacred place, requiring them to stay away from it; **or because** it is respected for its great sanctity which cannot be violated; **or because** it has been protected and preserved from the Deluge, this is the reason it is has been named '*atīq*', it has been saved from it, the Flood did not overcome it.⁽¹⁴⁾

e. The Ancient House (al-Bayt al-*'atīq*):

The House is described as ancient in two verses of the Holy Qur'ān:



1. “and go around the Ancient House.” Surat al-Ḥajj – The Pilgrimage verse 29.

﴿وَلِيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ﴾

2. “Then their place of sacrifice is at the Ancient House.” Surat al-Ḥajj – The Pilgrimage verse 33.

﴿ثُمَّ حَمَلُوهَا إِلَى الْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ﴾

Why is it described as ancient ('atīq)?

The ulama have advanced many hypotheses concerning the reason for describing the House as ancient, as follows:

1. It has been named ancient for its **antiquity**⁽¹⁵⁾; **ancient ('atīq) in the language** means older; we say an ancient sword, an ancient



dinar, which means old⁽¹⁶⁾. This is underlined by the words of Allah:

﴿إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي لَدَىٰ بَيْكَةِ
مَبَارَكًا وَهُدًىٰ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

2. “Indeed, the first House (of worship) established for mankind” Surat ‘Āli ‘Imrān (Family of Imran) verse 96.

It is the oldest place of worship.⁽¹⁷⁾

The name was given because **Allah Most High saved it (a‘taqa) from destruction by the mighty;** therefore no one was ever able either to dominate it or to approach it except with respect and for glorifying it.⁽¹⁸⁾

3. The word ‘atīq (with the idea of being preserved) was given



because **it has never been owned by anyone**. Ibn Zāhira (m) said: It is said that it is noble for Allah, as **it had never been dominated by any kingdom of Allah's creatures**. It has never been said "the House of so-and-so" rather we used to say "the House of Allah".⁽¹⁹⁾

4. The name *'atīq* was given because **in its Mosque, Allah Most High is preserving the sinners from punishment and hellfire**⁽²⁰⁾. The word *al-'atīq* also means the one who releases the sinners. The release is metaphorical: the Ka'ba itself, by its nature, is releasing the sinners who visit it and circumambulate it.⁽²¹⁾

This is stressed by the following ḥadīth narrated by 'Ā'isha (rh): Abū Bakr (r) came to Allah's Messenger (s) who said: **You are**



saved by Allah from the hellfire.

That day Abū Bakr received the name *'atīq*.⁽²²⁾

5. The name was given for its eminence and excellence, as in the language, one of the meanings of *'atīq* is noble and wonderful. It is said “the most beautiful quality in someone’s face” which means nobility. A woman called *'atīqa* means she is beautiful and noble.⁽²³⁾

All of the denominations mentioned above are correct, **but the closer to the truth is the very first one: the Ka'ba was described as ancient for its age.**

Ash-Shanqīṭī (m) preferred this meaning.⁽²⁴⁾



Secondly: The one who purifies (Qādis):

Among the names of the Ka'ba: *Qādis*, the one who purifies, coming from *at-taqdīs* (sanctification or purification), from there came the name of Allah al-Quddūs: the Pure One. And from there came the word *muqaddas*: the purified. *Al-Qādis* is the pure or the one who purifies⁽²⁵⁾, as the Ka'ba purifies from sins⁽²⁶⁾.

Thirdly: The Consecrated to Allah (Nādhir):

Among the names of the Ka'ba is *Nādhir*, "the Consecrated" to Allah, because sacrificial animals and other things are consecrated to Allah in the Sanctuary.⁽²⁷⁾



Fourthly: Rare, Precious (Nādir):

Another name of the Ka'ba is *Nādir* which comes from *an-nadra*. Al-Azharī (m) said: *an-nadra* is the fragment of gold or silver in an ore.⁽²⁸⁾

The Ka'ba was called “rare” as the Arabs used to visit it rarely, not often⁽²⁹⁾ and also because its shape and construction are singular or particular. Moreover it is rare thanks to its eminence and virtues.⁽³⁰⁾

Five: The Structure (al-Baniya):

Among the names of the Ka'ba is “the Structure” (**al-Baniya**). Ibn Manzūr (m) said: The name “the Structure”, i.e. the Ka'ba, was given for its honour as the most honourable construction⁽³¹⁾.

In the ḥadīth of al-Barā' Ibn Ma'rūr (r): “I had not to turn my back

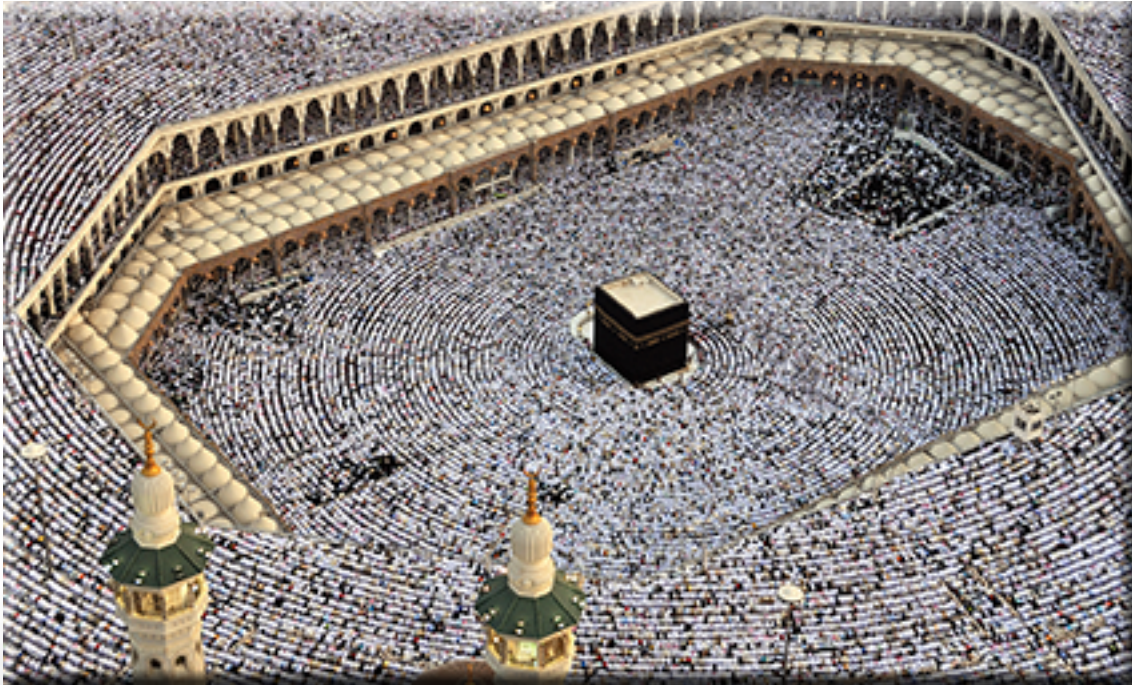


to this structure and to pray towards it”^(٣٢).

Ibn al-Athīr (m) said: The Ka'ba was called the Structure (al-Baniya) of Ibrāhīm (p), as he built it; and it was very common for the Arabs to take oath by the Lord of this structure.⁽³³⁾

Six: ad-Douwār/ad-Dawwār:

The reason for the denomination: the name refers to the circumambulation (**ṭawāf**) around the Ka'ba. In Arabic, *ad-douwār* is the plural of *dā'ir* which means



circulating; and *dawwār* means circulating a lot. Therefore both words are very similar, referring to the abundance of rotations or circles accomplished around the Ka'ba by the pilgrims⁽³⁴⁾.

Seven: The Direction (al-Qibla):

Allah Most High said:

﴿وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا﴾

“And We did not make the qibla which you used to face” Surat Al-Baqara – The Cow, verse 143. The words “which you used to face” are standing for the Ka'ba. And His word:



﴿كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ﴾

“You are the best community” Surat ‘Āli ‘Imrān – Family of Imran, verse 110.⁽³⁵⁾
The qibla or direction is the Ka’ba⁽³⁶⁾.



Endnotes

- (1) See: *al-Ḥaram al-makkī ash-sharīf wa al-a'lām al-muḥīṭa bihi dirāsa tārīkhiya wa may-daniya*, Dr. 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Dahīsh, p. 98; *Makka al-mukarrama, tārīkh wa ma'ālim*, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ḥamu, p. 40.
- (2) See: *Tafsīr al-Māwardī* (69/2); *Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī* (76/7).
- (3) See: *Lisān al-'Arab*, Ibn Manẓūr (718/1), *Mukhtār as-ṣiḥāḥ*, ar-Rāzī, p. 238.
- (4) See: *Lisān al-'Arab* (718/1); *Faṭḥ al-Bārī'*, Ibn Ḥajar (211/2).
- (5) See: *al-Ka ba al-musharrafa dirāsa ta lil li-l-khaṣā'ish at-taṣmīmiya*, Dr. Muḥammad Yaḥia Wazīrī, p. 18.
- (6) *Sharḥ an-Nawawī 'alā saḥīḥ Muslim* (14/9).
- (7) See: Surat al-Baqara – The Cow: 125, 127, 158; Surat 'Āli 'Imrān – The Family of Imran: 96, 97; Surat Al-'Anfāl – The Spoils of War: 35; Surat al-Ḥajj – The Pilgrimage: 26; Surat Quraysh: 3.
- (8) Surat al-Baqara – The Cow: 125, Surat Ibrāhīm: 37; Surat al-Ḥajj – The Pilgrimage: 26.
- (9) Examine examples of this in the following verses: Surat al-Mā'ida – The Table Spread: 97; Surat al-Ḥajj – The Pilgrimage: 29, 33; Surat at-Tūr: 4.
- (10) See: *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr*, 79/2, Muḥammad ash-Shawkānī.
- (11) *Al-muḥarrar al-wajīz fi Tafsīr al-kitāb al-'azīz* (208/1).
- (12) *Manā'ih al-karam fī Akhbār makka wa-l-bayt wa walāt al-ḥaram*, as-Sinjārī (257/1).
- (13) See: *Asmā' al-Ka'ba al-musharrafa fī ad-dars al-lughawī*, p. 20.
- (14) *Al-Kashshāf* (524/2).

- (15) See: *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, an-Nuḥās (403/4), *al-Kashshāf* (694/1).
- (16) See: (189/3) *Tahdhīb al-asmā' wa-l-luġha*, an-Nawawī (189/3); *Lisān al-'Arab*, Ibn Manẓūr (236/10).
- (17) See: *Aḍwā' al-bayān*, ash-Shanqīṭī (253/5).
- (18) See: *Dalā'il an-Nubuwwa*, al-Bayhaqī (125/1), *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* (285/3), *Tafsīr ath-Tha'labī* (20/7).
- (19) See: *al-Jāmi' al-laṭīf fī Faḍl Makka wa-ahlihā wa binā' al-bayt ash-sharīf*, p.19.
- (20) See: *Al-muḥarrar al-wajīz*, Ibn 'Aṭīya (119/4); *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* (53/12).
- (21) *Al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (339/6), *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, al-Ālūsī (147/17)
- (22) Reported by at-Tirmidhī, (616/5), H. 3679. Al-Albānī authenticated it in *Ṣaḥīḥ sunan at-Tirmidhī* (508/3), H. 3679.
- (23) See: *An-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth wa-l-'āthār*, Ibn al-Athīr (179/3), *Lisān al-'Arab* (263/10).
- (24) *Aḍwā' al-bayān*, ash-Shanqīṭī (253/5).
- (25) See: *al-Jāmi' al-laṭīf fī Faḍl Makka wa-ahlihā wa binā' al-bayt ash-sharīf*, p.100, *Bayān talbīs al-jahmiya* Ibn Taymiya (537/2).
- (26) *Mu'jam mā ista'jam*, al-Bakrī (290/1).
- (27) *Asmā' al-Ka'ba al-musharrafa fī ad-dars al-luġhawī*, p.25.
- (28) *Tahdhīb al-luġha* (67/14), *Lisān al-'Arab* (200/5).
- (29) *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, p.618.
- (30) *Asmā' al-Ka'ba al-musharrafa fī ad-dars al-luġhawī*, p.26.

- (31) *Lisān al-'Arab*, p.95, 14.
- (32) Reported by Aḥmad in his musnad (461/3), H 15836, Ibn Khuzayma in his Ṣaḥīḥ (223/1), H 429, the investigators of the musnad said (95/25), H 15798: ḥadīth qawī (strong), chain ḥassan (good).
- (33) *An-Nihāya fi gharīb al-ḥadīth wa-l-'āthār*, (158/1).
- (34) *Asmā' al-Ka'ba al-musharrafa fi ad-dars al-lughawī*, p.28.
- (35) *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* (123/1).
- (36) See: *al-Kashshāf* (225/1).

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