102590 - Is there any textual proof that Makkah al-Mukarramah is the centre of the earth?

the question

I heard that Makkah al-Mukarramah is the centre of the earth. Is that true?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Study of this issue may be viewed from two angles:

- the shar‘i angle, which means looking for proof in the Qur’an, hadeeth and athaar (reports) that have been narrated concerning this topic;

- the scientific angle, which means looking at scientific research and physical proof that will make the matter clear.

With regard to the shar‘i aspect, some of the scholars stated that in the Qur’an there are references to this point of view, and that in the Prophet’s Sunnah and reports from the early generations there are clear statements to that effect.

With regard to the references in the Qur’an, that is seen in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Thus We have made you a middle nation”

[al-Baqarah 2:143]

because the verse appears in the context of taking the Ka‘bah as a qiblah or direction faced in prayer, so it is as if the verse means: just as the Ka‘bah is the middle of the earth, so too We have

made you a middle nation among other nations.

Al-Qurtubi said in al-Jaami‘ li Ahkaam al-Qur’an (2/153):

What is meant is that just as the Ka‘bah is the middle of the earth, so too We have made you a middle nation.” End quote.

But this is one of six interpretations that the commentators have mentioned Concerning the words “Thus We have made you”; perhaps the most correct of them is that which was mentioned by Ibn Jareer at-Tabari in his Tafseer (3/141):

As We have guided you – O believers – by means of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and by means of what he has brought to you from Allah, and We have singled you out by guiding you to the qiblah and path of Ibraaheem, and We have favoured you thereby over the followers of other religions, so too We have singled you out and favoured you above the followers of other religions, by making you a middle nation. End quote.

See: Tafseer al-Qur’an al-‘Azeem, 1/454; Mafaateeh al-Ghayb, 2/387; ad-Durr al-Masoon, 2/134

Moreover, there is a reference to that in the verse in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And this (the Quran) is a blessed Book which We have sent down, confirming (the revelations) which came before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Towns (i.e. Makkah) and all those around it”

[al-An‘aam 6:92].

Some of the scholars said that Makkah was only called the Mother of Towns (Umm al-Qura) because it is the origin of all towns on earth, and from it the earth spread out; hence it is the centre of the earth.

Indeed, some of the scholars said that its name, Makkah, indicates that it is the centre and middle of the earth.

Ar-Raaghib al-Asfahaani said in Mufradaat al-Qur'an (1/470-471):

The name is derived from the verb makkaka, which refers to the action of sucking out marrow from a bone, or the action of a young animal suckling from its mother.

It is so called because it would tamukku whoever did wrong therein, i.e., it would crush him and destroy him.

Al-Khaleel said: It is so called because it is the centre of the earth, like the marrow which is in the middle of the bone. End quote.

See: Mafaateeh al-Ghayb, 4/310 for many other suggestions concerning the derivation of the name Makkah.

To sum up, the Qur'an does not contain any clear text or indication that Makkah al-Mukarramah or the Ka'bah is located at the centre or middle of the earth. The reports to that effect are no more than possible interpretations and ambiguous indications.

Secondly: with regard to the marfoo' hadeeths, i.e., those with isnaads going back to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), we tried to compile them from the books of the Sunnah, so that we could examine all their isnaads and reports, but we could not find anything but one marfoo' hadeeth on this topic, which is as follows:

It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

"The first spot to be created on earth was the location of the House (the Ka'bah), then the earth spread out from there. And the first mountain that Allah placed on the surface of the earth was Abu Qubays, then the mountains spread out from there."

Al-Mannaawi said in Fayd al-Qadeer (3/108):

"then the earth spread out from there" on all sides, so it is the centre of the earth and its pole. End quote.

But this hadeeth was narrated by al-‘Aqeeli in ad-Du‘afa’ al-Kabeer, 2/341; al-Bayhaqi in Musnad al-Firdaws, 1/1/11; Ibn ‘Asaakir in Tareekh Dimashq, 10/31. In al-Jaami‘ (9603) as-Suyooti attributed it to al-Haakim in his Tareekh.

All of them narrated it via Sulaymaan ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan, (who said): ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Ajlaan al-Qurashi told us: ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Jurayj told us, from ‘Ata’, from Ibn ‘Abbaas, in a marfoo‘ report.

This hadeeth is flawed because ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ali is unknown, and because the chain of narration ends with ‘Ata’ or Mujaahid.

This ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Ajlaan ad-Dimashqi narrated from Ibn Jurayj and from ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn Thabit ibn Thawbaan; Sulaymaan ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan, ‘Amr ibn ‘Uthmaan al-Homsi and his grandson Shaybah ibn al-Waleed narrated from him.

Nobody suggested that ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Ajlaan ad-Dimashqi was trustworthy except Sulaymaan ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan, and this was mentioned by Ibn ‘Asaakir in his biography of ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan in Tareekh Dimashq (35/133). But this Sulaymaan – who is Abu Ayyoob ad-Dimashqi – is subject to some criticism; he was criticised for his frequent narration from unknown narrators. Ibn Ma‘een said concerning him: He is trustworthy if he narrates from known narrators. Ibn Hibbaan said: His hadeeth is acceptable if he narrates from well-known, trustworthy narrators. But if he narrates from unknown narrators, then his reports are objectionable (munkar). See his biography in Tahdheeb al-Kamaal (12/26). Hence the scholars did not think that Sulaymaan ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan was trustworthy, because of some of those from whom he narrated. Al-‘Aqeeli described ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Ali as unknown (majhool), and he regarded his hadeeth as flawed. He said in his biography of him in ad-Du‘afa’ (2/341): He is majhool (unknown) with regard to transmission of hadeeth.

‘Ali ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez told us: Abu Na‘eem told us, al-Haarith ibn Ziyaad al-Ja‘fi told us: I heard ‘Ata’ ibn Abi Rabaah say: The first mountain to be placed on earth was Abu Qubays.

Abu Yahya ibn Abi Masarrah told us: my father told me: Sa‘eed ibn Saalim al-Miqdaah told us, from

Ibn Jurayj, from Mujaahid, who said: The first spot (to be created) of the earth was the site of the House (the Ka‘bah), from which the earth spread out.

Abu Ja‘far said: This report is more likely to be correct. End quote.

Something similar to this hadeeth was narrated from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him), as we shall see below. This explains the confusion of those who attributed the hadeeth to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

It was classed as da‘eef by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah ad-Da‘eefah, no. 5881

Thirdly:

Among the reports of the Sahaabah and Taabi‘een, there are many reports which indicate that they used to think that the centre of the earth was in Makkah al-Mukarramah.

1.

It was narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas said:

Allah created the House (the Ka‘bah) two thousand years before the earth … then the earth spread out from beneath it.

Narrated by at-Tabari in his Tafseer, 6/20 with an isnaad of which the narrators are trustworthy (thiqaat). In ad-Durr al-Manthoor (2/265) it is attributed to Ibn al-Mundhir, at-Tabaraani and al-Bayhaqi in ash-Shu‘ab.

2.

It was narrated that Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

The House (the Ka‘bah) was placed over the water on four pillars, two thousand years before this world was created, then the earth spread out from beneath the House.

Narrated by at-Tabari in his Tafseer, 3/61, with an acceptable isnaad.

3.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

The Ka‘bah was created two thousand years before the earth. They said: How could it be created before it, when it is part of the earth? He said: There was an island on the water, on which there were two angels who glorified Allah by night and day for two thousand years. Then when Allah wanted to create the earth, He spread it out from there and made it in the middle of the earth.

In ad-Durr al-Manthoor (1/115) this is attributed to Sa‘eed ibn Mansoor, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abi Haatim. I found its isnaad in Majlis Imla’ fi Ru’yat Allah tabaarak wa ta‘aala by Abu ‘Abdullah al-Daqqaaq (p. 287), and in Amaali Ibn Bashraan (2/204). Its isnaad includes Abu Ma‘shar Nujayh ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Madani, whose biography is in Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb (10/422). Most of the hadeeth scholars are of the view that he is da‘eef (weak).

Among the Taabi‘een:

Something similar was narrated from Mujaahid, ‘Ata’, ‘Amr ibn Dinar and others, as is stated by Ibn Abi Haatim and at-Tabari in their Tafseers, and also in Musannaf ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq (5/90). Among the books that narrated many such reports is Akhbaar Makkah by al-Azraqi and Akhbaar Makkah by al-Faakihi.

These reports may be deemed marfoo‘ (attributable to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), but they may also be narrated from the People of the Book, because their books are filled with stories of the creation of the heavens and earth and the beginning of creation. That is supported by the fact that the previous report was narrated from Ka‘b al-Ahbaar. It was also narrated from him by ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq in al-Musannaf (5/95) that he said: The House (the Ka‘bah) was floating on the water forty years before Allah, may He be exalted, created the earth, and from it the earth spread out. End quote.

It was narrated from Qataadah (may Allah have mercy on him) – in Fadaa’il as-Sahaabah by Imam Ahmad (2/901) – that the rock of Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) is the centre of the earth.

This makes one feel that this matter is taken from the contradictory reports from the People of the Book.

Fourthly:

From the above, we conclude that there is no clear proof to strongly indicate that Makkah al-Mukarramah is the centre is the earth. Rather the indications that we have quoted from some texts, according to what some of the scholars understood from them, and the reports mentioned above, makes one feel that there is some basis for this idea. This is circumstantial evidence that supports the view of those who say that, so long as there is no evidence to the contrary from sound scientific proof.

Fifthly:

With regard to the scientific angle, we are not specialists in geography, so we have to leave the discussion here. But we will tell you of some specialist scientists who have researched this matter and reached the conclusion that Makkah al-Mukarramah is indeed the centre of the earth. Perhaps in their scientific research there is something that will support this view, whilst the matter is still subject to research, and in the end it is something that is subject to ijtihaad that may or may not be correct.

See:

Dissertation: Isqaat al-Kurrah al-Ardiyyah bi'n-Nisbah li Makkah al-Mukarramah by Dr Husayn Kamaal ad-Deen Ahmad, Majallat al-Buhooth al-Islamiyyah, Riyadh, 2/292

Dissertation: al-Isqaat al-Makki li'l-'Aalam, Dr Husayn Kamaal ad-Deen Ahmad, Majallat al-Buhooth al-Islamiyyah, Riyadh, 6/225.

And Allah knows best.