

**Ahmed Zaki Yamani.** *The House of Khadījah bint Khuwaylid in Makkah al-Mukarramah—Allah be pleased with her—A Historical Study of Its Location, Building and Architecture.* Translated by Ayman Abdel Haleem. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2014. pp. 176. ISBN 1-905122-58-6.

*The House of Khadījah bint Khuwaylid in Makkah al-Mukarramah—Allah be pleased with her* documents with meticulous care a unique event in the modern history of Islamic archaeology. In the winter of 1410/1989, during the first phase of the expansion of the outer courtyard of the Masjid al-Ḥarām, construction workers uncovered the remains of ancient buildings on the south-eastern side of the *mas'ā*—the space between the two hillocks, al-Ṣafā' and al-Marwah, described in the Qur'an as being among the *sha'ā'ir Allāh* (“symbols of Allah”)—and near the former *al-Mudda'ā* market. The location, known as Barḥat al-Qubbān, lay close to the former site of the school for *ḥuffāz* built by Shaykh 'Abbās Qaṭṭān, which Makkan historical tradition had long identified as standing over the house of the Mother of the Believers, Sayyida Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, the first wife of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace.

The construction workers initially had no awareness of the historical significance of what had been uncovered. One of them, however, reported the discovery to higher authorities, and the news eventually reached Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the author of this study. Yamani—who had served as Saudi Arabia's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources from 1962 to 1986 and as a leading figure in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)—was uniquely positioned to intervene. Trained in law at Cairo University, New York University, and Harvard University, and holding a doctorate from the University of Exeter, he had long combined political authority with institutional reach. Although dismissed from office three years earlier, in October 1986, the fifty-nine-year-old Yamani immediately grasped the importance of the discovery.

As he records, upon receiving the news he “visited the site himself and volunteered to provide all the resources required for such a sensitive

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undertaking,” enabling work to begin without delay and in a manner commensurate with the site’s significance (p. 115). After the area was secured, a team of specialist engineers and experienced workers was assembled to carry out the excavation as swiftly and carefully as possible. The work proceeded for nearly one month, beginning on 29 Rabī‘ al-Ākhir 1410/29 November 1989 and concluding on 27 Jumādā al-Ūlā 1410/26 December 1989. Yet the excavation narrative, powerful as it is, represents the culmination rather than the starting point of Yamani’s inquiry. The foundations of the study are laid in the “Introduction,” where the historical and methodological significance of the house is established long before the spade enters the ground.

The “Introduction” (pp. 17–19) performs a crucial historiographical task by restoring the house of Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her—to its proper rank within the sacred and historical landscape of early Islam. Drawing meticulously on the earliest Makkan authorities, Yamani demonstrates that this dwelling was not merely the Prophet’s first marital home but the primary site of his prophetic life for a decisive span of thirteen years—from the age of forty until fifty-three, when he migrated to Madina. In total, the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—lived in this house for twenty-eight years, from the time of his marriage to Khadijah at the age of twenty-five until the Hijrah, a duration exceeding the years he spent in any other single dwelling. Within its walls revelation descended, foundational Qur’ānic passages were revealed, and the earliest acts of worship and conversion took place. By anchoring these claims in early historical testimony rather than later devotional amplification, Yamani enables the reader to apprehend the house not as an ancillary monument but as one of the most significant lived spaces of the formative Islamic period, second only—during the Prophet’s lifetime—to the Sacred Mosque itself.

Equally important is the methodological framework laid out in the “Introduction,” which prepares the ground for the study as a whole. Yamani does not approach the excavation as an isolated archaeological episode but embeds it within a layered historical inquiry that moves from biography to urban topography, from textual memory to architectural transformation. Preference is given to early Makkan historians over later compilations, close attention is paid to measurements and spatial relations, and travellers’ accounts are employed critically as witnesses to changing devotional and urban practices. By situating the excavation within a continuous Makkan historiographical tradition—culminating in the precise descriptions of al-Fāsi—Yamani establishes in advance the evidentiary standards by which the discovery will be assessed.

Chapter 2 provides rich biographical details of the life, merits and high

station of Sayyida Khadijah, Allah be pleased with her. The use of primary sources, authentic Hadith reports and succinct remembrance of her eminence lays the foundation of the importance of the house. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, “confirmed her superiority by not taking a second wife alongside her for as long as she lived. After her death, he grieved deeply for her, and continued to mention her, speak highly of her, praise her, and acknowledge the love he felt for her as well as her superiority over other wives.” (p. 30). She was the best of women on earth and in Paradise.

The architectural and historiographical backbone of Yamani’s study (Chapter 3) undertakes the ambitious task of reconstructing the historical life of the house of Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her—across more than thirteen centuries, tracing how a single domestic space was preserved, transformed, and re-signified within the evolving urban and sacred fabric of Makkah. It proceeds from a clear methodological premise: that the Makkan historical tradition preserves not only narrative memory of sacred sites, but also sufficiently precise architectural data to permit reconstruction. Yamani therefore treats the accounts of early and later Makkan historians—foremost among them al-Azraqī, al-Fākihī, Ibn al-Ḍiyā’, and especially Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī—as providing cumulative technical testimony. Measurements, orientations, counts of arches and pillars, descriptions of doors, prayer niches, courtyards, and elevations are extracted, collated, and subjected to systematic comparison.

What emerges from this process is a diachronic architectural portrait of the house. Yamani shows that while the structure underwent several renovations, expansions, and functional changes—most notably its conversion into a mosque following its purchase by Mu‘awiyah—its core spatial identity remained remarkably stable. Certain key interior spaces recur with consistency across the sources: the Dome of Revelation, the Birthplace of Fāṭimah—Allah be pleased with her—and the Place of Concealment. Their relative positions, proportions, and relationships to surrounding features persist even as the house was gradually integrated into the expanding complex of the Sacred Mosque.

One of the chapter’s most significant contributions lies in its careful tracing of architectural change over time. Yamani documents how successive political authorities—Umayyad, Abbasid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman—intervened in the structure, sometimes expanding it, sometimes renovating it, sometimes reorienting its access points in response to rising street levels and shifting urban circulation. These changes are presented not as acts of erasure, but as evidence of sustained custodianship. The house is shown to have been continuously recognized as a site of exceptional sanctity, worthy of

preservation even as its surroundings were repeatedly reconfigured.

Particularly striking is Yamani's use of comparative measurement. By reconstructing the cubit-based dimensions recorded by al-Fāsi and converting them into modern units, then correlating them with excavation data, the chapter demonstrates a remarkable degree of precision in pre-modern Makkan historiography. Far from being impressionistic or symbolic, these descriptions often correspond closely to the physical remains uncovered in 1410/1989. In this way, Chapter 3 quietly but decisively rehabilitates the technical credibility of Islamic urban historical writing.

Equally important is the chapter's treatment of the house's gradual incorporation into the Sacred Mosque complex. Yamani traces how arcades were added, prayer niches introduced, and open courtyards absorbed, such that the house came to function simultaneously as domestic memory, mosque space, and sacred landmark. This layered identity complicates any simplistic distinction between private and public, or between house and mosque, and reveals instead a fluid continuum shaped by devotion, governance, and urban growth.

By the end of the chapter, the reader is equipped with a conceptual and architectural framework that renders the later excavation intelligible. The excavation does not introduce new spatial categories; rather, it confirms, with material evidence, the structures already mapped textually. In this sense, Chapter 3 transforms the excavation from an act of discovery into an act of verification, establishing that the house uncovered in 1410/1989 corresponds in its essential features to the house described by Makkan historians centuries earlier. Chapter 3 does far more than catalogue architectural details. It demonstrates how a sacred domestic space was remembered, measured, maintained, and reimaged across time, and how historical texts can function as reliable witnesses to the built environment. It is here, more than anywhere else in the book, that Yamani's project reveals its full scholarly ambition.

As a site of continuous historical attention over more than a millennium, the house of Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her—emerges most vividly in the accounts of travellers, which begin to appear in the mid-3rd/9th century and continue into the early twentieth. The earliest such testimony is preserved by Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Azraqī (d. ca. 250/864), who devotes a chapter of his *Akhbār Makkah* (also cited as *Tārīkh Makkah*) to “the locations in Makkah where prayer is recommended and the relics pertaining to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace.” This is closely followed by Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Fākilī (d. ca. 272/885), whose *Akhbār Makkah fī Qadīm al-Dahr wa Ḥadīthih* remains the most extensive early topographical history of the city. Among medieval witnesses, however, particular importance attaches to Abū l-Ḥusayn

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr al-Kinānī al-Andalusī (d. 614/1217), whose *Rihla* preserves one of the earliest detailed eyewitness descriptions of the house.

The final traveller to record the site before its disappearance was Eldon Rutter (1891–1957), the British Muslim traveller and writer who visited Makkah in 1344/1925. His two-volume *The Holy Cities of Arabia* (London, 1928) preserves the last known direct observation of the house's location and exterior. Rutter writes:

The birthplace of Fāṭimah (Mūlid Sitna Fāṭimah) is situated in the Zugāg el-Hajar, which is in the quarter lying on the opposite side of Sūk el-Layl to Shiab Ali. This site is some thirty yards square, and is entered from Zugāg al-Hajar through a small doorway in a stone wall. It belonged to Muḥammad's wife, Khadijah, and in it were born their children, of whom the Lady Fāṭimah is the best known. The ground inside the enclosure is four or five feet below the level of the street. (p. 108)

Rutter occupies a distinctive place among modern Western visitors to Makkah. A recent convert to Islam, he travelled to the Hijaz in 1925–26 in the guise of a Syrian pilgrim, at a moment of profound political transition: the collapse of centuries-old Sharifian governance and its replacement by Saudi rule, only a year after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. His account thus captures not only sacred topography but an urban and political order on the brink of disappearance. Because of both his date and his access, Rutter is widely regarded as the last traveller to have observed the house of Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her—before all visible trace of it vanished from the city's surface. His testimony therefore stands at the threshold between direct observation and inherited memory.

After Rutter's visit, the house rapidly passed from visibility into absence. By 1354/1935, Muḥammad Ḥaykal reported that the site had become an empty tract of land, devoid of any remaining visible trace. Later visitors—including Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ḥabīb in 1356/1938 and Muḥammad Luṭfī Jum'ah in 1359–60/1940–41—could no longer see the structure itself and contented themselves with transmitting remembered descriptions, neighbouring landmarks, and inherited topographical knowledge. What emerges from these accounts is a progressive contraction of historical access: the house recedes from lived space into transmitted memory alone.

Thus the present study, which documents the reappearance of the house during the expansion of the eastern courtyard of the Sacred Mosque in 1410/1989, records an extraordinary yet fleeting re-exposure of the blessed house of Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her. When Yamani and his team uncovered and identified the remains of the house, reconfirmed

its architectural features, documented the dimensions and relationships of its rooms and walls, and preserved its memory through photographs and technical drawings, they did more for the collective Muslim memory than merely recover the details of a sacred site. Through eyewitness testimony combined with architectural measurement and sustained engagement with early Makkan historiography, they left a final, verifiable imprint of the locus of revelation itself, establishing the authenticity of the site and the integrity of the findings, including the identification of eight principal interior spaces.

The book concludes with a carefully enumerated set of findings that crystallize its scholarly contribution. Chief among these is the demonstration that Khadijah—Allah be pleased with her—owned several houses in Makkah, and that the residence treated in this study, located in al-Ḥajar Alley on the north-eastern side of the Sacred Mosque, was the home she shared with the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, where revelation was received and where their children were born. Yamani traces the house's continuous use as a mosque from the time of Mu'āwiyah until the twentieth century, documents the architectural and nomenclatural changes it underwent across the centuries, and shows how shifts in street levels gradually caused it to sink from view. The excavation findings correspond closely with the last reliable pre-modern descriptions of the house, particularly those of al-Fāsī, whose measurements are reconstructed through careful conversion and three-dimensional modelling.

The book's description of the final phase of the excavation is treated with notable restraint. A small number of artefacts are recorded, including a fragment of a hand-mill traditionally associated with Fāṭimah—Allah be pleased with her—and stones found near a prayer niche. These finds are noted without sensationalism. At the conclusion of the month-long excavation, the entire house and its annexes were deliberately filled in with specially prepared fine sand, free of salinity and impurities, and carefully levelled—an act undertaken explicitly to preserve what had been uncovered even as the site itself was returned to concealment. The excavation thus constitutes a rare instance in modern sacred archaeology in which discovery led not to exposure or display, but to intentional reburial.

Yamani does not state it explicitly, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the decision to rebury the house could not have been his. Given the high sensitivity of the Wahhābī-oriented religious outlook of the contemporary Saudi establishment, the reappearance of a site so closely associated with the Prophet's domestic life was bound to provoke a drastic response. Yet one cannot help but ask—echoing Martin Lings's quiet misgiving—whether there might not have been a better way to forestall potential *shirk* without consigning

one of the most consequential houses in Islamic history once more to silence.

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***Key Terms of the Qur'an—A Third Review***

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This third review of Nicolai Sinai's *Key Terms of the Qur'an* is not an isolated response to a single author nor a continuation of some academic fixation. It is part of a broader concern: why does so much Western Qur'anic scholarship remain unable to grasp the internal logic, conceptual architecture, and hermeneutical sophistication of the Islamic scholarly tradition? The first review surveyed the work's structural promises and its pervasive superficiality; the second examined the entry on "Allah"—the heart of Qur'anic theology—and showed how the methodological framework of the *Key Terms* project is incapable of accommodating the Qur'an's metaphysical grammar. This third review takes a single term of immense significance, Guidance (*hudā*)—together with its opposite, Misguidance (*ḍalāl*)—in order to expose, with concrete illustration, the deeper epistemic traps and inherited habits of interpretation that continue to plague Western academic approaches to the Qur'an.

Among the conceptual constellations of the Qur'an, guidance occupies a privileged place. It lies at the heart of Qur'anic anthropology, cosmogony, prophecy, and soteriology; it involves divine will, human response, moral responsibility, and eschatological culmination. An entry on *hudā* in a critical dictionary of Qur'anic concepts should illuminate these dimensions. Sinai's entry begins with a promising nod in this direction: he notes that guidance and misguidance belong to the Qur'an's pervasive moral polarities, linked conceptually to belief and repudiation, sightedness and blindness, moral health and moral sickness. One anticipates a careful mapping of the Qur'an's internal semantics, its metaphysical commitments, and its multi-layered portrayal of divine and human agency. Instead, what follows is the familiar descent into the methodological crucible that has shaped Western Qur'anic studies for over three centuries: Sinai's entry opens with "Guidance in pre-