

## «مقاله پژوهشی»

## سنجش دیدگاه زغلول النجار بر مرکزیت زمین از نگاه قرآن

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### چکیده

مکان‌های زیادی در طول تاریخ به عنوان مرکز زمین معرفی شده است، شهرهای قرشپیر در ترکیه، جیزه در مصر، تولسا در اوکلاهاما، شیز در ایران، اورشلیم در اسرائیل و مکه در عربستان. برای اثبات مرکزیت این شهرها در زمین (به جز مکه) دلایل محکمی از سوی معتقدان ارائه نشده است و تنها علت آن اهمیت فرهنگی و مذهبی این شهرهاست؛ زغلول النجار نویسنده مصری با بیان دلایل دینی و علمی، مکه را مرکز زمین می‌داند. در این پژوهش در ابتدا با بیان دیدگاه‌های زغلول النجار درباره مرکز زمین و مصادیق احتمالی مرکزیت زمین به نقش دین در حل تعارض‌های علمی اشاره شده است و با دلایل قرآنی و روایی اثبات شده است که کعبه در سرزمین مکه می‌تواند به عنوان مرکز زمین قلمداد شود، دعوت جهانی اسلام و شروع آن از مکه، آیات مشتمل بر گسترش زمین از مکه نظیر طحوالارض، دحوالارض و مدالارض و تطبیق آن با دلایل علمی و مفهوم‌شناسی مکه، البیت‌العتیق و ام‌القری از مهمترین دلایل بر این مدعا است.

### واژه‌های کلیدی

قرآن، مرکز زمین، مکه، دحو الارض، زغلول النجار، روشنگری

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تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۳/۱۱/۰۴

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۴/۰۲/۰۹

### استناد به این مقاله:

روستا، مرضیه؛ دهقان منگابادی، بمانعلی و حیدری مزرعه آخوند، محمدعلی (۱۴۰۴). سنجش دیدگاه زغلول النجار بر مرکزیت زمین از نگاه قرآن. فصلنامه قرآن و روشنگری دینی، ۳۱-۴۸، (۱)۶.

(DOI: 10.30473/quran.2025.69231.1301)

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Perspective of Zaqlūl al-Najjār on the Centrality of the Kaaba on Earth from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint

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Received: 23 Jan 2025  
Accepted: 29 Apr 2025

**How to cite**  
Rosta, M., Dehghan Mangabadi, B. & Heydari Mazraa Akhund, M.A. (2025). The Perspective of Zaqlūl al-Najjār on the Centrality of the Kaaba on Earth from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint. *Quran and Religious Enlightenment*, 6(1), 31-48. (DOI: [10.30473/quran.2025.69231.1301](https://doi.org/10.30473/quran.2025.69231.1301))

## ABSTRACT

Throughout history, numerous locations have been proposed as the center of the Earth, including cities such as Çorum in Turkey, Giza in Egypt, Tulsa in Oklahoma, Shiz in Iran, Jerusalem, and Mecca in Saudi Arabia. However, with the exception of Mecca, advocates for these sites have generally failed to provide compelling evidence for their centrality, often basing their claims on cultural or religious traditions rather than empirical data. Egyptian scholar *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* asserts that Mecca is the true center of the Earth, supporting his view with both religious and scientific arguments. This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach to outline *al-Najjār's* perspective on the centrality of the Kaaba and explores the possible manifestations of this centrality. The discussion highlights the role of religious interpretation in addressing scientific debates and substantiates the claim that the Kaaba in Mecca can be regarded as the center of the Earth. Key arguments include the global call to Islam originating from Mecca, Qur'ānic verses that reference the expansion of the Earth from Mecca—such as concepts like "*Taḥwul al-'Arḍ*," "*Dahwul al-'Arḍ*," and "*Mad al-'Arḍ*" and the alignment of these concepts with scientific evidence and the semantics of terms such as "*al-Bayt al-'Atīq*" and "*Umm al-Qura*."

## KEY WORDS

Qur'ān, Center of the Earth, Mecca, *Dahwul 'Arḍ*, *Zaqlūl al-Najjār*.



## Introduction

The centrality of the Earth and the identification of its center have long been subjects of debate among scholars of both the natural sciences and religious studies. Some have considered Çorum in present-day Turkey, while others have proposed Tulsa in the state of Oklahoma, United States, as the center of the Earth. In addition to scientific communities, various religions have also argued for the centrality of the Earth, each introducing their own sacred city as its center. In ancient Iranian thought, the city of Shiz was regarded as the center of the Earth; among Jews, the Temple of Solomon (*Masjid al-Aqṣā*) in Jerusalem; according to followers of Chinese religions, the Temple of Heaven in Beijing; and for Muslims, the *Ka'bah* in Mecca (Eliade, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 33).

Among contemporary researchers, *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* has presented arguments that combine scientific reasoning with religious perspectives, which can further reinforce his claims. The reinforcement of these arguments is significant not only from a scientific standpoint but also from a religious one. Here, "religion" refers specifically to Islam and its Qur'ānic foundations, as the Creator is described thus: "Say: It has been sent down by He who knows the secret in the heavens and the earth; indeed, He is ever forgiving and merciful". (al-Furqān, 25:6) On the other hand, Western societies have also witnessed a return to religion and its role in scientific controversies, as well as a critique of positivism and materialism. Numerous studies have addressed the role of religion in resolving scientific conflicts, such as the principle of causality and randomness in quantum mechanics, the primacy of soul or body, the question of evolution, the origin or development of humankind, heliocentrism versus geocentrism, and more.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method to present the views of *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* and other perspectives regarding possible manifestations of the Earth's centrality. Ultimately, by reasoning from Qur'ānic verses, it concludes that Mecca (the *Ka'bah*) can be considered the most appropriate example of the Earth's center.

The main research questions are as follows:

- Can religion (the Qur'ān) play a role in scientific controversies?
- What evidence does the Qur'ān present regarding the centrality of Mecca (the *Ka'bah*) on Earth?

As for the research background, based on the conducted review, no study has been found with this specific title or a critical evaluation of various candidates for the Earth's center. However, two articles are noteworthy: "A Conceptual Analysis and Evaluation of Narrations Indicating the Centrality of the *Ka'bah* on Earth" by Parvin Baharzadeh and Farideh Amini in the Journal of Qur'ānic and Hadith Sciences, and "An Inquiry into the *Ḥadīth of Dahw al-Arḍ*" by Seyyed Ali Akbar Rabinattaj and Zahra Lazeri in the Journal of Hadith Studies. These two articles focus on evaluating the narrations of *Dahw al-Arḍ* from the perspective of *Fiqh al-Hadith and Rijāl*, and, while emphasizing the compatibility of the content of these narrations with Qur'ānic verses, tend to highlight the spiritual centrality of the *Ka'bah* and Mecca in the order of creation. In contrast, the present article, in addition to emphasizing the spiritual centrality of Mecca and the *Ka'bah*, seeks to demonstrate-by presenting the scientific perspective of *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* in light of Qur'ānic verses-the physical and material centrality of this location.

The following sections will first examine the scholarly life of *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* and present his views, along with other perspectives on possible manifestations of the Earth's centrality. Finally, by comparing his perspective with Qur'ānic verses in the context of the convergence of religion and scientific issues, the centrality of Mecca (the *Ka'bah*) as the center of the Earth will be substantiated.

### 1. *Zaqlūl al-Najjār's* Perspective and the Centrality of the *Ka'bah* on Earth

Dr. *Zaqlūl Rāghib Muḥammad al-Najjār* was born on November 17, 1933, in the village of *Basyūn*, *Gharbiyya* province, Egypt (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 5). He is regarded as a moderate advocate of the scientific interpretation of the Qur'ān. His academic training is in geology. *Al-Najjār* memorized the Qur'ān in his childhood, and this Qur'ānic background, together with his scientific education, enabled him to contribute to the field of scientific *I'jāz* in the Qur'ān. Moreover, he was influenced by the ideas of *Ḥasan al-Bannā*, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn*, and *Muḥammad 'Abduh*; as a result, Dr. *al-Najjār's* intellectual pursuits have spanned both the scientific miracles of the Qur'ān and political matters concerning the Islamic world (ibid.).

With the exception of a few works in his specialized field of geology, most of his publications can be divided into two categories: scientific-Qur'ānic and ḥadīth studies and political works (Shirafkan, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 231–232). Among his significant contributions to scientific interpretation is the four-volume *Tafsīr al-Āyāt al-Kawniyya fī al-Qur'ān* (Interpretation of the Cosmic Verses in the Qur'ān), which covers verses from *Sura al-Baqarah* to *al-Qāri'a*. Other notable works on the scientific miracles of the Qur'ān include *al-*

*Ḥayawān fī al-Qur'ān* (Animals in the Qur'ān), *al-Ard fī al-Qur'ān* (The Earth in the Qur'ān), *al-Samā' fī al-Qur'ān* (The Sky in the Qur'ān), and the five-volume *al-Nabāt fī al-Qur'ān* (Plants in the Qur'ān).

*Zaqlūl al-Najjār* holds the view that the *Ka'bah*, and by extension the city of Mecca, is the center of the Earth in the order of creation. To support this theory, he cites the Qur'ānic verse: "...*Wa li Tundhira Umma al-Qurā wa Man Ḥawlahā...*" (...That you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it..., al-An'ām: 92) as an internal religious argument. He also considers the verse "*Inna Awwala Baytin Wuḍi'a li al-Nāsi Lalladhī bi Bakka...*" (Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Bakka..., Āli 'Imrān: 96–97) to contain a scientific miracle, asserting that the land of the *Ka'bah* was the first part of the earth's landmass to emerge from beneath the waters, and that the discovery of Mecca's centrality on Earth supports this claim (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 564). He then presents several arguments to demonstrate the scientific *I'jāz* of these verses.

#### 1.1. Mapping Qibla Directions and Discovering the Centrality of Mecca

One of the arguments presented for the centrality of Mecca is based on the evidence provided by Dr. *Kamāl al-Dīn* in his article "*Isqāṭ al-Kurra al-Arḍiyya bil Nisba li Makka al-Mukarrama wa Ittijāh al-Qibla*" (Projecting the Globe in Relation to Mecca al-Mukarrama and the Direction of the Qibla). By tracing the paths leading to Mecca on a map, he observed that locations sharing the same eastern longitude as Mecca all lie on a straight line (39.817° east), which is the geographic north-south axis passing through these points. Thus,

in cities that share the same longitude as Mecca, the direction of prayer (*Qibla*) is precisely due north or due south, depending on their latitude relative to Mecca. The same principle applies to the meridian corresponding to Mecca's longitude at  $140.183^\circ$  west; for cities located along this line, the direction of prayer is exactly geographic north or south, determined by their respective latitudes. This geometric alignment is presented as evidence that Mecca occupies a central position on Earth (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 566-568).

### 1.2. The Theory of Continental Drift

According to scientific findings, the Earth originally consisted of a single supercontinent, which later split into seven major landmasses due to the formation of rifts and faults. These continental plates are still gradually drifting apart. Dr. *al-Najjār* presents this theory as one that can corroborate Dr. *Kamāl al-Dīn's* discovery regarding Mecca's centrality on Earth. He maintains that throughout all geological eras—whether during the time when all land was joined as one continent or in subsequent periods—Mecca has always been the Earth's center (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 564).

In geology, this concept is known as the theory of plate tectonics (*Taqnīyat al-Alwāḥ*), continental drift (*Injirāf al-Qārāt*), and the separation of continents. The theory was first introduced by W. Jason Morgan and later advanced by the British geologist Arthur Holmes in his books *The Age of the Earth* and *Principles of Physical Geology*, and it remains valid to this day. This theory aligns with the Qur'ānic concept of *Dahw al-Arḍ* and its related verses. In the fields of geography and meteorology, Alfred Wegener proposed the theory of continental drift, positing that millions of years ago, the continents that now form the Earth's landmasses were once joined

together in a supercontinent called Pangaea (*Panghāyā*), located in the region of present-day East Africa, which corresponds to the current location of Mecca (Pourmotamed, 1978 AD/1357 SH: 89).

From a scientific perspective, the movement of the Earth's crust from a single point is plausible, but whether this point is Mecca requires further investigation. *Mohammad Hasan Asadian Fallāḥīyeh*, an Iranian geologist, in his article "Geodynamics from the Perspective of *Dahw al-Arḍ* and Where Is the Geodynamic Pole of the Earth?" argues that the starting point of this movement was Mecca (Asadian Fallahiyeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 7).

### 1.3. Absence of Magnetic Deviation along the Longitude of Mecca al-Mukarrama

Another scientific argument is the absence of magnetic deviation along the longitude of Mecca. In Dr. *Kamāl al-Dīn's* proposed model, all locations sharing the same longitude as Mecca at  $39.817^\circ$  east lie on a straight line, which is the geographic north-south axis. This means there is no magnetic deviation along this line (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 600).

### 1.4. The Land Beneath the Ka'bah as the Oldest Part of the Earth's Lithosphere

Dr. *al-Najjār* also proposes that the land beneath the *Ka'bah* is the oldest part of the Earth's lithosphere (surface). He acknowledges, however, that this claim requires more precise geological studies of the age of the rocks and terrain surrounding the *Ka'bah*, and he presents it as a suggestion for further research by Muslim scientists (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 584).

Archaeological science also identifies East Africa as the oldest inhabited region on Earth by human species. Africa is considered the world's oldest continent, with a history dating

back to the early pre-Neolithic period (Menkes, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 67).

From the sum of these scientific discussions, it can be concluded that the Earth expanded from the region of Mecca and its surroundings. By integrating scientific discoveries with revealed knowledge, Mecca can be regarded as the center of the Earth.

## 2. Possible Candidates for the Center of the Earth

Throughout history, various social actors and scientists have proposed certain cities as the center of the Earth. Examples include Kırşehir in Turkey, Giza in Egypt, and Tulsa in Oklahoma.

### Kırşehir, Turkey:

Kırşehir is a city located in Central Anatolia, Turkey. In 1973, Andrew J. Woods, using geographical science and specific coordinates, identified this region as the center of the Earth (Woods, 1973: 23). However, the only justification for this claim is Woods' assertion, which did not gain significant attention in the scientific community and was subject to criticism.

### Giza, Egypt:

In 1864, Charles Piazzi Smyth, the Royal Astronomer of Scotland, provided coordinates for the location of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. He argued that the prime meridian of the Earth should pass through the Great Pyramid, as it crosses more land than any other location. Smyth also noted the cultural significance of this site and its proximity to Jerusalem (Smyth, 1864: 460). Later, Isenberg identified this location as the center of the Earth (Isenberg, 2003: 27). However, this claim did not receive scientific endorsement, and no evidence from

cosmology, geology, or related fields was presented. The designation appears to stem from the cultural and historical importance of the Egyptian pyramids.

### Tulsa, Oklahoma:

Another location proposed as the center of the world is the city of Tulsa in Oklahoma. A circle was established there, with its center designated as the "center of the Earth." However, no scientific theory or endorsement from cosmologists, geographers, or geologists supports this claim; it is primarily mentioned in news outlets. The rationale is that if one stands in the middle of the circle and makes a sound; the echo is amplified, which has been interpreted as evidence of centrality.

### Shiz, Iran:

Shiz is another city considered a possible geographical center of the Earth (Eliade, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 33). This belief originates from the city's religious significance in Zoroastrianism, but there is no internal or external religious or scientific evidence supporting its centrality.

### Jerusalem:

Another candidate is the Wailing Wall and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, a view rooted in Jewish beliefs. Proponents cite certain passages from the Bible that emphasize the importance of Jerusalem, such as:

"Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her." (Ezekiel 5:5)

There are also references to wars involving Jerusalem and prophecies about its ultimate victory and the spread of Jewish thought from Jerusalem throughout the world (Zechariah 14:1-8; John 4:22; Genesis 9:1; Genesis 8:4).

Some have also referred to mentions of the "four corners of the earth" in Isaiah (Isaiah 12:11; Revelation 1:7; Revelation 8:20). However, these biblical arguments primarily highlight the spiritual and cultural significance of Jerusalem, rather than providing any reference to its geographical centrality on Earth.

### 3. The Role of Religion in Resolving Scientific Conflicts

Religion, particularly Islam and the Holy Qur'ān, can serve as a standard for evaluating scientific theories, given its foundation in divine revelation. According to Islamic belief, the Qur'ān originates from a Creator described as "Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is, over all things, Disposer of affairs." (al-Zumar 39:62; Ghāfir 40:62) This Creator is believed to possess complete knowledge of the past, present, and future: "He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, Knower of the unseen and the witnessed. He is the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful." (al-Hashr 59:22; al-Taghābun 64:18) Thus, the concepts presented in the Qur'ān are understood to be derived from this all-knowing Creator.

In response to those who dismissed the Qur'ān as baseless or mere legends, the scripture asserts: "Say, 'It has been sent down by He who knows the secret in the heavens and the earth; indeed, He is ever Forgiving and Merciful.'" (al-Furqān: 6) The phrase "*Anazalahu Alladhī Ya'lamu al-Sīrra fī al-Samāwāti wa al-Ard*" emphasizes the Qur'ān's reliability as a measure for scientific theories, since empirical sciences are the product of human reasoning, which is inherently limited and lacks comprehensive knowledge of the past and future. In contrast, the Qur'ān is seen as the product of an omnipotent, wise Creator who knows both the unseen and the seen, and in whom there is no falsehood: "Falsehood cannot

approach it from before it or from behind it; [it is] a revelation from a [Lord who is] Wise and Praiseworthy." (al-Fuṣṣilat: 42)

Within Islamic thought, some scholars have drawn upon Qur'ānic verses to resolve scientific controversies, addressing issues such as the principle of causality in physics, the primacy of the soul, evolution, human origins, and debates over heliocentrism versus geocentrism. For example, *Sayyid Morteza Hosseini Shahroudi*, in his article on quantum physics and the principle of causality, critiques Newtonian mechanics and supports the quantum perspective, which aligns with the Qur'ānic affirmation of causality: "And if you asked them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and the moon?' they would surely say, 'Allah.' Then how are they deluded?" (al-'Ankabūt: 61); "Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?" (al-Ṭūr: 35)

Mehdi Golshani, in his article "The Primacy of the Soul from the Perspective of the Qur'ān, Islamic Philosophers, and Contemporary Western Scholars," argues for the primacy of the soul alongside matter and the body. He notes that the dual nature of human beings—that is, possessing both body and soul—has long been a subject of debate (Golshani, 2018 AD/1396 SH: 107). In the modern era, dominated by empiricism, the prevailing view has been that matter is primary and that the soul and life are products of material processes. However, according to Golshani, some leading contemporary scientists maintain that consciousness is not material and cannot be explained by empirical science, with some even considering consciousness as a unique endowment from God. The Qur'ān, meanwhile, explicitly affirms the primacy of the soul alongside the material body: "So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My

[created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration." (al-Hijr: 29)

The return to religion and the recognition of empiricism's limitations in resolving scientific conflicts have also attracted attention in the West. Positivism, introduced by Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century, was based on the belief that only direct sensory data are valid and that religious and philosophical perspectives would eventually disappear (Hosseini Eskandian, 2023 AD/ 1402 SH: 5–8). This approach, which opposed idealism, led to a new method in scientific research that rejected philosophy and religion. For a time, it gained followers such as Rudolf Carnap, Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach, Herbert Feigl, Kurt Gödel, Hans Hahn, Philipp Frank, and Otto Neurath, with Karl Popper being its most renowned proponent (Beitel, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 6). Among Popper's critics was Leo Strauss, who argued that Popper's approach to philosophy and metaphysics was "Insulting" and described his book *The Open Society* as "Ideological nonsense," a "Scandal," and a "Waste of time to read." Strauss specifically criticized Popper's understanding of Plato, stating, "Popper is so ignorant of philosophy and such a beginner in ideological demagoguery that he cannot even approximately reproduce the content of a page of Plato's works. Reading philosophy and metaphysics is of no benefit to him. His knowledge is so meager that he does not understand what the author is saying." (Haghdar, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 5)

In Iran, philosophers such as Davari Ardakani have also regarded the separation of religion and metaphysics from the natural sciences as futile and have been serious critics of Popper's ideas (Davari Ardakani, 2005 AD/ 1384 SH: 203–205).

These disagreements became the main reason for the rejection of positivism, drawing the attention of experimental scientists to a gap in research, and leading them to seek a resolution to scientific conflicts through a revival of religion. Many have come to believe that the solution to conflicts between scientific theories must be found in religious knowledge. Notably, Thomas Kuhn, in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pointed to the role of religion in resolving scientific conflicts. Michael Ruse (biology), Andrei Linde and George Francis Ellis (cosmology), and even Newton and Einstein have all engaged with religious concepts in their scientific work. This convergence of science and religion is also reflected in works such as Bernard d'Espagnat's *Physics and Philosophy*.

Given the growing recognition of the role of religion and the Qur'ān in resolving scientific conflicts, the following section will examine the Qur'ānic arguments for the centrality of Mecca (the *Ka'bah*) on Earth.

#### 4. Qur'ānic Arguments for the Centrality of Mecca

Given the established role of religion in resolving scientific conflicts and the revealed nature of the Qur'ān, Qur'ānic reasoning provides a strong basis for evaluating *Zaqlūl al-Najjār's* theory regarding the *Ka'bah's* (Mecca's) centrality on Earth. Below there are the main Qur'ānic arguments supporting this perspective.

##### 4.1. The Universal Call of Islam

Among the verses that can be cited as Qur'ānic evidence for the centrality of the *Ka'bah* and Mecca are verse 92 of *Sura al-An'ām* and verse 7 of *Sura al-Shūrā*, alongside other verses referring to the universal mission of Islam:

"And thus We have revealed to you an Arabic Qur'ān so that you may warn the Mother of Cities (*Umm al-Qurā*) and those around her..." (al-Shūrā: 7)

"And this is a blessed Book which We have sent down, confirming what was before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around her..." (al-An'ām: 92)

The repeated phrase "*Li Tundhira umma al-Qurā wa Man Hawlahā*" (to warn the Mother of Cities and those around her) in both verses, along with the Qur'ān's universal message, is interpreted by many exegetes as a miraculous reference to Mecca's centrality on Earth. Some commentators, considering the phrase "*Qur'ān Arabī*" (an Arabic Qur'ān) and the Meccan context of these surahs, have restricted the scope of the invitation to Mecca and the surrounding Arab tribes. However, the broader language and context suggest a universal mission, reinforcing the idea of Mecca's central role.

#### 4.1.1. *Umm al-Qurā* (Mother of Cities)

The term "*Umm al-Qurā*" is a compound of "*Umm*" (mother, origin, or foundation) and "*al-Qurā*" (villages or cities). "*Umm al-Shay'*" means the essence or foundation of something (Rāghib Isfahānī, n.d.: 1, 85).

"*al-qurā*" is the plural of "*Qarya*" (village), so "*Umm al-Qurā*" denotes the origin or center of all settlements. Early Qur'ānic commentators unanimously identified "*Umm al-Qurā*" as Mecca (Ṭabarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 7, 180), a view maintained by later exegetes as well (Tūsī, n.d.: 4, 201; Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 4, 517; Fakhr al-Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 13, 165; Ibn 'Āshūr, n.d.: 6, 219; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 18, 17; Ṣādiqī Tehrānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 10, 138).

As for why Mecca is called "*Umm al-Qurā*," various explanations have been offered:

#### 4.1.1.1. The Spreading of the Earth from Mecca

Some Qur'ānic commentators, drawing on a set of narrations known as *Riwāyāt Dahw al-Arḍ* (narrations of the spreading of the earth), believe that Mecca was the point from which the dry land of the earth began to emerge from beneath the primordial waters in the early stages of the planet's formation. For example, al-Ṭabarī, citing early authorities, writes: "It has reached me that the earth was spread out from Mecca." (al-Ṭabarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH, vol. 7, p. 180) Thus, Mecca is regarded as the origin and "Mother" of the world's landmasses—a view echoed by later commentators as well (al-Ṭabrisī, 1993AD/1372 SH: 4, 517; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 334; Maḥḥarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 3, 276; Ṣādiqī Tehrānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 10, 138).

This interpretation is also supported by narrations attributed to Imam 'Alī (a), who reportedly stated that Mecca is called "*Umm al-Qurā*" because the spreading of the earth began there (Ibn Bābawayh, 1988 AD/1408 AH: 2, 593; Ibn Manẓūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 1, 32–34). This view directly supports *Zaqlūl al-Najjār's* theory regarding continental drift and the antiquity of the Ka'bah as the earth's oldest landmass (al-Najjār, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 564).

#### 4.1.1.2. The First Structure Raised on Earth

A number of commentators maintain that the *Ka'bah* was the first house built on earth, which is why Mecca is called the "Mother and Center of Settlements." This is supported by Qur'ān 3:96: "Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Bakka, blessed and guidance for the worlds." This understanding is endorsed by both classical and modern exegetes (Sayyid Quṭb, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 2, 1148; Muḥḥnīyah, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 3, 225; Ṣādiqī Tihrānī, 1986AD/1365 SH: 10,

138) and is further reinforced by narrations describing how God created the earth by gathering the primordial foam at the site of the *Ka'bah*, making it the first spot to emerge, from which the rest of the earth was extended (Ibn Bābawayh, 1988 AD/1408 AH: 2, 593; Qummī, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 1, 210; Baḥrānī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 2, 451; Sabzivārī Najafī, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 3, 64).

This concept is also present in Sunni traditions, where it is reported that Mecca is called "*Umm al-Qurā*" because the first house was established there (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1998 AD/ 1419 AH: 4, 1345). This view further supports *Zaqlūl al-Najjār*'s theory regarding the primordial antiquity of the *Ka'bah* (*al-Najjār*, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 564).

#### 4.1.1.3. The Most Revered City and Qibla of Other Lands

Some exegetes argue that Mecca is so named because, due to the presence of the *Ka'bah*, it is the qibla (direction of prayer) for all other cities, and it is from Mecca that the Islamic call spread to the rest of the world (Nasafī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 2, 35; Abū al-Su'ūd, n.d.: 3, 162; Qummī Mashhadī, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 4, 392; Khaṭīb, n.d.: 4, 238; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 7, 278). Mecca is the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) of God, named "*Umm al-Qurā*" so that, just as people honor their mothers, all people would turn toward and revere it (Ṭabrisī, 1993AD/1372 SH: 4, 517). This concept is also supported by verses related to the pilgrimage: "And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House-for whoever is able to find thereto a way..." (Āli 'Imrān:97)

#### 4.1.1.4. Mecca as the Central Point of the Earth

The idea that Mecca occupies the central point or midpoint (*wasat*) of the Earth is another reason cited by a group of Qur'ānic commentators for its designation as *Umm al-Qurā* (Mother of Cities). *Ibn 'Aṭīyyah al-Andalusī* a prominent 6th-century exegete, considers Mecca's centrality on Earth as one of the four main explanations for this title (Ibn 'Aṭīyyah al-Andalusī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 7, 376). This view is also echoed by *Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī*, another major commentator of the same era (Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, 1988 AD/1408 AH: 2, 322). According to these interpretations, Mecca is called *Umm al-Qurā* because the land was expanded from Mecca, and the entire world is oriented around the *Ka'bah* (Ṭanṭāwī, n.d.: 4, 43; Ṭabarānī, 2008: 5, 441; Makkīb. Abī Ṭālib, 2008: 10, 6559; Qushayrī, n.d.: 3, 343).

There is scholarly consensus that "*Umm al-Qurā*" refers specifically to Mecca. Notably, before the advent of Islam and the revelation of the Qur'ān, Mecca was not known by this title, which further highlights the Qur'ān's unique and scientifically remarkable designation. Dr. *Jawād 'Alī*, in his work *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab Qabla al-Islām*, asserts that *Umm al-Qurā* is a Qur'ānic name that was only applied to Mecca after the Prophet's mission ('Alī, 1970, vol. 4, pp. 9–12). This point is also reflected in a poem attributed to *Lady Khadījah*, which praises the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and states that Mecca gained its honor and the title "*Umm al-Qurā*" because of him (Amini Najafī, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 2, 17).

#### 4.1.2. The Meaning of "Those Around Her" (*Man Ḥawlahā*)

While exegetes unanimously agree that "*Umm al-Qurā*" refers to Mecca and, by extension, the

*Ka'bah*, there is some debate regarding the scope and meaning of the phrase "Those around her." (*Man Hawlahā*)

#### 4.1.2.1. The Entire Earth and the Order of Creation

Many early and later commentators (including Ibn 'Abbās and Qatāda) interpret *man ḥawlahā* as referring to all the people of the world (Ṭabarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 7, 180; Ṭūsī, n.d.: 4, 201). They cite the universality of the Qur'ānic message, the spreading of the earth's land from Mecca, and the *Ka'bah's* role as the qibla and spiritual refuge for all humanity as evidence for this interpretation. Since the Qur'ānic invitation is not limited to the Arabs or the neighboring cities of Mecca (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 10, 139), and since the Prophet's mission is for all inhabitants of the earth and even the heavens (Ṣāwī, 2006 AD/1427 AH: 3, 421), *man ḥawlahā* is understood to encompass all of humanity.

Numerous verses support the universal mission of Islam, such as:

"Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion upon His Servant that he may be to the worlds a warner;" (al-Furqān:1) "And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of good tidings and a warner..." (Saba': 28) "It is nothing but a reminder to the worlds." (al-Qalam: 52)

Some commentators, referencing the *Dahw al-Arḍ* narrations and verses such as al-Nāzi'āt: 30, al-Shams: 6, and al-Ghāshīya: 20, believe that all the earth's landmasses originated from Mecca, so *man ḥawlahā* can be applied to all lands and peoples of the earth (Muqātil al-Balkhī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 3, 764; Fakhr al-Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 13, 65; Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 5, 346).

Given Mecca's spiritual centrality as the midpoint of the earth, to which all people turn,

the concept of *man ḥawlahā* extends beyond the physical region of Mecca (Ḥawwī, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 9, 5073; Ṭūsī, n.d.: 4, 201; Nīshābūrī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 6, 68). This is further supported by the Qur'ānic injunctions regarding pilgrimage and prayer direction:

"And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House-for whoever is able to find thereto a way..." (Āli 'Imrān: 97); "So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Ḥarām. And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it..." (al-Baqara: 144)

#### 4.1.2.2. The Tribes Surrounding the Ka'bah and Mecca

Some exegetes, referencing the kin-based invitation and the Meccan context of the two surahs (al-An'ām and al-Shūrā), as well as the phrase "*Qur'ānan 'Arabiyyan*," interpret the term "*Man ḥawlahā*" (those around her) as referring specifically to the environs of Mecca and the neighboring Arab tribes and territories. This view is held by a minority of commentators who, based on the Meccan origin of these surahs, argue that the warning is directed at the people of Mecca and its surroundings. They also cite the verse "And warn your nearest kindred" (al-Shu'arā': 214) as evidence that the initial warning was meant for the Prophet's own relatives (Ibn 'Ashūr, n.d.: 6, 219; idem: 25, 107).

However, this interpretation is subject to critique. Limiting the scope of these verses to the historical and geographic context of Mecca solely because the surahs are Meccan overlooks the universal nature of the Qur'ān's message. Fundamental tenets such as monotheism, resurrection, and prophethood were all established in Mecca, yet the Qur'ānic invitation is global and timeless. According to many exegetes, the Qur'ān's warning unfolds in three stages: first to relatives, then to the Arabs,

and finally to all of humanity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 18, 17). Thus, while the immediate audience of these verses may be the people of Mecca and its environs, this does not negate the broader, universal scope of the Qur'ānic message (Darwazah, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 4, 123).

Other Qur'ānic verses further reinforce the universality of the message, extending the warning and invitation beyond kin and region (general, beyond region, beyond land):

- General: "Rather, it is the truth from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you, so they may be guided" (al-Sajda: 3);

- Beyond region: "Is it astonishing to people that We revealed [a message] to a man from among them, [saying], Warn mankind..." (Yūnus: 2; See also: al-Ḥajj: 49, al-Furqān: 1, Saba': 28);

- Beyond land: "And this Qur'ān has been revealed to me that I may warn you thereby and whomever it reaches..." (al-An'ām: 19).

The phrase "*Qur'ānan 'Arabīyyan*" in "*Kadhālika Awhaynā Ilayka Qur'ānan 'Arabīyyan...*" (al-Shūrā: 7) has led some commentators to interpret "*man ḥawlahā*" as referring to Mecca and its neighboring lands where Arabic was spoken. However, the term "*Arabīyyan*" does not exclusively denote the Arabic language. Linguistically, "*Arabīyyan*" also connotes clarity and eloquence, as the root "-r-b" is associated with clarity of speech and expression. In classical Arabic, "*al-'Arab min al-Mā'*" refers to clear, pure water (Bustānī, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 604; Ma'lūf, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 495).

Lexicographers have noted that "*Arrabtu lahū al-Kalām Ta'rīban wa A'rabtu lahu I'rāban*" means "I made the speech clear to him," and "*a'rab anhu lisānahu*" means "he

spoke clearly and eloquently." (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 1, 5; Zabīdī, n.d.: 2, 217) Thus, "*Arabīyyan*" in the Qur'ān often refers to clarity and manifest expression, not merely the Arabic language. In fact, the opposite of "*Arab*" is "*Ajam*," which means obscurity or lack of clarity (Ma'lūf, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 489; Jawharī, 1984AD/1404 AH: 5, 1980).

Some exegetes emphasize this aspect of clarity in "*Qur'ānan 'Arabīyyan*," interpreting it as a reference to the manifest and reasoned nature of the Qur'ān, not just its language (Modarresi, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 12, 285). The Arabic language is thus seen as uniquely capable of conveying the profound meanings of the Qur'ān, and translations, while helpful, cannot fully capture its clarity and depth (Ṣādiqī Tih-rānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 26, 118; idem: 15, 9). The Arabic language is the clearest of all languages, and that is why it is called "Arabic." Likewise, in verse 37 of Surah al-Ra'd, God uses the term "*arabīyyan*" to describe the ruling, meaning that the ruling is clear and explicit, not merely that it is in the Arabic language (Sadeghi Tehrani, 1998 AD/1419 AH, vol. 1, p. 235): "...And thus We have revealed it as a clear judgment..." (al-Ra'd: 37).

The word "*Arabī*" in the nominative form and "*Arabīyyan*" in the accusative form appear eleven times in the Holy Qur'ān: seven times as a description of the Qur'ān itself (*Qur'ānan 'Arabīyyan*), once as a description of a ruling (*Hukman 'Arabīyyan*), and three times as a description of language (*Lisānan 'Arabīyyan*). In all instances, these terms occur in the context of verses that, on the one hand, call to reason, knowledge, piety, faith, warning, clarity, and detail, and on the other hand, reject falsehood, sorcery, and any form of distortion or deviation in the Qur'ān. All of these usages are found in Meccan surahs.

For example, the call to reason: "Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān so that you might understand." (Yusuf: 2) Warning and glad tidings: "And before it was the Book of Moses as a guide and mercy. And this is a confirming Book in an Arabic tongue to warn those who do wrong and as good tidings to the doers of good." (al-Aḥqāf: 12); Clarification of the Book: "And if We had made it a non-Arabic Qur'ān, they would have said, 'Why are its verses not explained in detail?'..." (Fuṣṣilat: 44) The phrase "They would have said, 'Why are its verses not explained in detail?'" indicates that the revelation of the Qur'ān in clear Arabic is a reason for its manifest nature, not merely that it is in the Arabic language. The term "*A jamī*" means obscure, ambiguous, and unclear, not simply non-Arabic. *Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī* also states that if the revealed Qur'ān's concepts and objectives were not clear, or if it lacked coherence and eloquence, or if it contained falsehood, its opponents would have found grounds for objection (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 17, 399; Modarresi, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 12, 246); Rejection of distortion: "An Arabic Qur'ān, without any deviation, so that they may be conscious." (al-Zumar: 28); Rejection of sorcery: "And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse-and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down-they say, "You, [O! Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies]." But most of them do not know." (al-Naḥl: 101) God then refutes these false accusations, stating that the Qur'ān was revealed by Himself through Gabriel: "Say, 'The Pure Spirit has brought it down from your Lord in truth to make firm those who believe and as guidance and good tidings to the Muslims.'" (al-Naḥl: 102) Finally, He affirms the Arabic and wise nature of the Qur'ān: "And We certainly know that they say, 'It is only a human being who teaches him.' The

tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this [recitation] is a clear Arabic language." (al-Naḥl: 103)

#### 4.2. The First Place Established

Another set of verses that can be cited as evidence for the centrality of the Ka'bah-and, by extension, the city of Mecca-on earth are verses 96 and 97 of Surah *Āli 'Imrān*, where God states: "Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at *Bakkah*, blessed and a guidance for the worlds." (Āli 'Imrān: 96–97)

From the phrase "The first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at *Bakkah*," it can be inferred that, from the beginning of creation and the formation of the earth, the *Ka'bah* was among the very first places established in the created order. The land of the *Ka'bah* was the first site to be established on the earth's surface, and the earth's landmasses expanded from this point to other locations (Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 2, 797; *Fayḍ Kāshānī*, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 161). In a narration from Imam *al-Bāqir* (AS), it is stated that when God intended to create the earth, He commanded the winds to blow over the surface of the water, causing waves and foam to form, which then gathered into single foam mass at the present location of the *Ka'bah*. God transformed this foam into a mountain, created the *Ka'bah* from it, and then spread the earth beneath it. This corresponds to the divine statement: "Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind..." (‘Arūsī Ḥuwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 5, 502; Qummī Mashhadī, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 3, 165) This concept, known as "*Dahw al-Arḍ*," "*Ṭahw al-Arḍ*," "*Mad al-Arḍ*," and "*Sath al-Arḍ*," is supported by several Qur'ānic verses and aligns with *Zaqlūl al-Najjār*'s theory of continental drift (Najjār, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 564).

#### 4.2.1. Dahw al-Arḍ

"And after that, He spread the earth." (al-Nāzi'āt: 30)

The term *dahw* means to spread or expand. Ibn Manzūr defines it as "To spread out." (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 14, 251) Many commentators have identified the *Ka'bah* as the starting point of this spreading (Muqātil al-Balkhī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 4, 578; Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 30, 89). Some interpret the period of *dahw al-arḍ* as occurring after the creation of the heavens, marking the stage when the earth was spread and prepared for vegetation (Fakhr al-Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 31, 46). Ayatollah Tāleqānī considers this verse to refer to the initial phase of the earth's creation, its separation from its original source, and its expansion (Taleghani, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 3, 106). *Zaqlūl al-Najjār* interprets it as referring to two processes: the expulsion of all water and gaseous layers from inside the earth, and the release of carbon dioxide, which cooled the earth and made it ready for plant growth and life (Najjār, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 135). Overall, this verse describes the stage of creation when the earth's dry land expanded and became ready for vegetation, which can implicitly support the claim of Mecca's centrality on earth. Numerous narrations also support this concept; for example, Imam al-Riḍā (AS) said: "On the twenty-fifth night of Dhū al-Qa'dah, the earth was spread from beneath the *Ka'bah*." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 2, 241)

#### 4.2.2. Ṭahw al-Arḍ

"And [by] the earth and He who spread it." (al-Shams: 6)

*Ṭahw* is similar to *dahw* and means spreading or expanding (Farāhīdī, n.d.: 3, 277; Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 15, 4). Commentators interpret this phrase as referring

to the spreading of the earth, which began from Mecca (Samarqandī, n.d.: 3, 583). This spreading is considered the prerequisite for life on earth, as the verse intends to show God's favor in making the earth vast, fertile, and habitable (Sayyid Quṭb, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 6, 3917; Ṭantāwī, n.d.: 15, 412).

#### 4.2.3. Saḥ al-Arḍ (Leveling of the Earth)

"And at the earth, how it is spread out!" (al-Ghāshiyah: 20)

The leveling or spreading of the earth refers to its expansion: "God leveled the earth" means He spread it out (Jawharī, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 1, 375; Farāhīdī, n.d.: 3, 129). God spread the earth from Mecca, with the *Ka'bah* as its center (Muqātil al-Balkhī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 4, 679). This expansion enabled life, livelihood, and human settlement (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 30, 301).

#### 4.2.4. Mad al-Arḍ

"And the earth-We spread it out and cast therein firmly set mountains and made grow therein [something] of every beautiful kind." (Qāf: 7; also al-Hijr:19; al-Ra'd: 3)

*Mad* means to extend or spread out; it refers to the emergence of the earth's land from beneath the water. God spread and leveled the earth, making it fertile and suitable for life (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 3, 396). This process prepared the earth for the habitation of living creatures (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 26, 101; Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, 1988 AD/1408 AH: 20, 140). Through *Mad al-Arḍ*, the earth became ready to sustain life (Ṣādiqī Tehirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 27, 273; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996AD/1417 AH: 18, 340).

### 4.3. Semantic Analysis of Mecca, *al-Bayt al-‘Atīq*, and *Umm al-Qurā*

The names of cities and even individuals can reveal much about the culture of a region and even scientific concepts. Several of the names for Mecca mentioned in the Qur’ān indicate the centrality of the *Ka‘bah* on earth and the spreading of land from this region. The following examines and explains each of these names:

#### 4.3.1. Mecca

Mecca is one of the names for the city where the *Ka‘bah* is located, and it is mentioned in the Qur’ān: "He it is who restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the valley of Mecca after He had given you victory over them..." (al-Fath: 24)

Various reasons have been given for the naming of Mecca. Some explicitly state that Mecca was named as such because it is the center of the earth; for example, just as the marrow is at the center of the bone, Mecca is at the center of the earth (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, n.d.: 1, 772; Zubaydī, n.d.: 13, 646). The word "*Makka*" is derived from the expression "Tamakkaktu al-‘Aẓm," meaning "I extracted the marrow from the bone." (Ansariyan, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 3, 571)

Another explanation is that the word refers to extracting water from the center of the earth, as in the practice of drawing water from wells in Mecca’s arid region (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 10, 491). According to a narration from Imam ‘Alī (AS), Mecca was so named because "God spread the earth from beneath it." (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 30, 90)

#### 4.3.2. *al-Bayt al-‘Atīq*

The term "*al-Bayt al-‘Atīq*" appears in two verses of the Qur’ān (al-Ḥajj: 29, 33). "*‘Atīq*"

means ancient, as opposed to new or recent, and the reason the *Ka‘bah* is called "*al-Bayt al-‘Atīq*" is its precedence over all other places in terms of establishment on earth (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 10, 235). The term is also used for Meccan surahs that were revealed earlier than the Medinan ones (*Bil ‘Itāq al-Awwal*). The Qur’ān states: "Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Bakkah, blessed and guidance for the worlds". (Āli ‘Imrān: 96) Commentators explain that "*al-Bayt al-‘Atīq*" refers to the *Ka‘bah* being the first in both time and place, and that the earth was spread out from beneath it (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 20, 85; Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, 1996AD/1417 AH: 14, 371).

#### 4.3.3. *Umm al-Qurā*

One of Mecca’s names is "*Umm al-Qurā*," and as previously discussed, this term signifies that Mecca is the origin of the earth’s landmasses and, consequently, the created order. Other places across the world have their origin in this point, just as a child originates from its mother.

### Conclusion

1) Many cities have been proposed as the center of the Earth, but none of these locations are supported by both scientific and religious evidence-except for Mecca, which is substantiated by both types of arguments;

2) *Zaqlūl al-Najjār*, an Egyptian geologist and a moderate proponent of scientific Qur’ānic exegesis, considers Mecca to be the Earth’s center based on several arguments: mapping qibla directions on geographic maps, the theory of continental drift, the absence of magnetic deviation along Mecca’s longitude, and identifying the *Ka‘bah* as the oldest part of the Earth’s lithosphere;

3) Qur'ānic verses such as *Tahw al-Arḍ*, *Dahw al-Arḍ*, *Mad al-Arḍ*, and *Sath al-Arḍ* indicate that Mecca is the center of the Earth and that the expansion of land and the created order began from this point. These verses support and reinforce *Zaqlūl al-Najjār's* theory regarding continental drift;

4) Narrations about *Dahw al-Arḍ* further support the idea that the expansion of the Earth began from Mecca, and thus the *Ka'bah* and Mecca can be considered the center of the Earth. These narrations also reinforce *Zaqlūl al-Najjār's* continental drift theory;

5) The semantic analysis of names associated with Arabia and the *Ka'bah*, such as *al-Bayt al-'Atīq*, *Mecca*, and *Umm al-Qurā*, also indicates that the expansion of the Earth began from Mecca and the *Ka'bah*, supporting the view that this location is the Earth's center and reinforcing *Najjār's* claim that the *Ka'bah* is the oldest part of the Earth's lithosphere.

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