Between Text and Terrain: 7th-Century Meccan Residential Structures

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Abstract

The houses of 7th-century Mecca have not been a subject of significant scholarly research. In fact, not only the houses of Mecca but also studies examining Mecca as a city with an urban identity are notably absent. Mecca has primarily been studied for its sacred status as the site of the Kaaba, a revered place of worship. While analyzing Mecca in terms of its sacred spaces is not inherently a deficiency, the focus of this study is to set aside Mecca's sanctity and investigate whether its houses, as part of an urban identity, hold any architectural significance or value. As far as can be observed, during the era in which the Prophet Muhammad lived and the Qur'an was revealed, the general appearance of Meccan houses did not represent an advanced level for its time. Based on the limited information available about the appearance of these houses, it isn't easy to provide a definitive depiction. However, an informed conjecture can be made. Accordingly, if the Kaaba and other sacred spaces in Mecca are excluded, it could even be questioned whether the area qualifies as a city. In this article, we have set aside Mecca's sanctity and examined the city not in all its aspects but solely in the context of its houses.

Keywords: Islamic history, Mecca, City, Houses, Architecture, *Ka'aba*.

Introduction

A house, as a space, is fundamentally a subject of architecture, just as a city is. But how can we reconcile and explain the concepts of city and house when it comes to Mecca? A city or town is formed by its structures, but what makes a city a city is not primarily its buildings but its inhabitants. No city emerges spontaneously; thus, while a village is natural, a city is artificial, requiring human intervention to shape it. It is likely based on these fundamental principles that Joseph Schacht (d. 1969), who studied the internal developmental mechanisms of early Islamic thought and institutions and emphasized the importance of understanding contemporary phenomena to grasp early Islamic art and culture, stated, "The Islamic religion neither desired nor demanded an architectural identity." This judgment is not entirely correct, nor is it entirely wrong. It is incorrect because architecture has no inherent connection with religion, or more precisely, with Islam; the core issue lies with the followers of that religion. Similarly, Max Weber (d. 1920) held negative views about Mecca, the birthplace of Islam, as a city with an urban identity. Weber, who had read C. Snouck

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Hurgronje's (d. 1936) writings on Mecca (*Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century*), particularly in his work *The City*, argued that Mecca did not exhibit the characteristics of a true city. Indeed, he is not entirely unjustified in this judgment, as even today, whether Mecca was a genuine city remains debatable.

Our knowledge about the city of Mecca during the period when the Prophet lived and before his migration to Madinah is less than what we do not know. As a living space, apart from its natural features such as mountains, rocks, valleys, wells, caves, roads, and sacred areas, little is known about the essence of the city. Here, the "essence of the city" refers to its structural features—the tangible manifestations of human touch and consciousness in what we now call urban architecture. What were the houses, rooms, chimneys, streets, and avenues of 7th-century Mecca like? For instance, were there public baths or toilets in the city? There is no evidence of such facilities. Moreover, there is no literature addressing these topics, nor are there any serious publications on the subject. Due to the sanctity of the area, archaeological data cannot be utilized, leaving us to sift through fragmented information buried within Islamic historical sources, as if searching with a flashlight.

If the Kaaba is excluded, there is almost no structure in Mecca that bears the mark of human hands. Therefore, the judgment that "Mecca consists solely of the Kaaba" may not be a misleading description. If the Kaaba and the surrounding sacred areas—such as Arafat, Mina, Muzdalifah, Safa and Marwa, the Zamzam Well, and the Station of Abraham—are set aside, the very existence of Mecca as a settlement could be questioned. How can a place without a bath or a toilet in the 7th century be called a city?

We still lack proper knowledge about any man-made, non-natural structures in Mecca outside the Kaaba. While early Islamic sources provide limited information, modern depictions of Mecca, often distorted by ideological motives, make it difficult to assess the reality. Had the Qur'an not been revealed here or provided clues to describe the place, we would likely be deprived of even the little information we possess today. The phrase "Mecca's dark ages" may be disheartening, but unfortunately, this is the reality.

In essence, what makes a city a city is the capacity and level of consciousness of its inhabitants. Or, to put it differently, while buildings create a city, it is the citizens who make it a polis. The issue is not limited to Mecca alone. Modern commentators who attribute the role of an urban planner to the Prophet—claiming he transformed Madinah into a polis or even a city-state after the migration—do great injustice to him, who said, "You know your worldly affairs better than I." The truth is not as they portray.

This article examines 7th-century Mecca not in all its aspects but solely in terms of its houses as living spaces. Unfortunately, the sources' accounts of the houses of Mecca are far less comprehensive than assumed. One of the main reasons for this is the scarcity of monographs on Mecca. Another is that Muslim historians and

geographers, when describing a city, tend to focus on human-centered narratives rather than space-centered ones. For example, a prominent feature of such works is that when discussing a city, poets, scholars, rulers, or residents occupy a significant place, while the city itself receives less attention. When it comes to Mecca, another issue arises: due to its sacred status, many of the narratives and transmitted reports are presented with a certain aura of divinity. In ancient times, it was believed that the gods founded cities. Today, however, it is known that cities belong to the realm of human action.

Discussing 7th-century Meccan houses is more challenging than discussing Madinah 's. This is partly due to the limited information provided by the sources on this topic. Even in the most comprehensive works on Mecca by authors like Azraqi (d. 250/864), Faqihi (d. 278/891), and Fasi (d. 832/1429), detailed information about Meccan houses is scarce. Moreover, much of what is narrated about Mecca is framed within the context of the Madinah period. In contrast, when it comes to the city, houses, and urbanization, the Madinah period offers a wealth of material. For instance, in Samhudi's (d. 911/1506) *Wafa al-Wafa bi Akhbar Dar al-Mustafa*, almost every house in Madinah is mentioned by name, with varying degrees of detail, whereas the same cannot be said for Mecca.

Works such as *Futuḥ al-Buldan* and *al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik* do not provide information about the architecture of a specific region or city; rather, they discuss cities in terms of their geographical features. These works also lack satisfactory information about Mecca. For instance, Balādhurī's (d. 279/892) historiography predominantly centers on the Madinah n period, offering only fragmentary references to Mecca and its environs. His account emphasizes hydrological features—such as wells and flood events—while conspicuously neglecting architectural descriptions of domestic structures[i] Largely relying on Balādhurī, another author, Yāqūt al-Hamawī (d. 626/1229), focuses on geographical elements such as regions, cities, towns, villages, seas, rivers, islands, deserts, mountains, valleys, plains, ribāṭs, and monasteries.[ii] Similarly, Yaʿqūbī's (d. 292/905) *Kitāb al-Buldān*[iii] and his historical works, as well as Masʿūdī's (d. 345/956) *Murūj al-Dhahab* and *al-Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*[iv], and Maqdisī's (d. 390/1000) *Ahsan al-Taqasim*[v], follow the same pattern. These works are not only interested in Islamic geography but also provide firsthand information about different geographies, societies, and cultures. The authors documenting these regions not only describe their firsthand observations but also uncritically reproduce historiographical and topographical information inherited from earlier traditions. Their primary subjects include geographical regions, seas, islands, rivers, mountains, various animals and plants, minerals, and the histories of Indians, Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Sassanids, Turks, and pre-Islamic Arabia.

Additional details about Mecca are preserved in the works of prominent cultural historians, including Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih

(d. 328/940), and later chronographers such as al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418). However, their works do not center on architecture and thus are not very helpful to us.

The abundance of words related to tents in Arab culture necessitates examining lexical studies. Therefore, lexicographers such as Azharī (d. 370/980), Jawharī (d. 400/1009), Ibn Manzur (d. 711/1311), Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415), and Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) provide information that, rather than focusing on the phenomenon itself, centers on words, offering an incomplete picture of Meccan houses.

This leaves us with biographical (*sīra*) and hadith sources. Although these sources contain the most information about the Meccan period, the data in the hadiths require meticulous deconstruction to be usable, necessitating collaboration between hadith scholars and art historians.

In short, whether due to a lack of sources or the fact that existing sources adopt a human- and geography-centered (natural) perspective rather than a space-centered one, the resulting picture is not very encouraging. These shortcomings, combined with Mecca's status as a sacred region, further obscure the city's shadowed aspects. Therefore, the primary aim of this article is to contribute to an environmental depiction and highlight that Mecca, as a city, has many unknown dimensions beyond its sacred identity.

As far as we can see, studies on this subject are quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate. What has been done so far does not go beyond a few books and articles.[vi] Thus, the topic remains a virgin field awaiting research. With this article, we aim to draw the attention of Islamic historians, scholars of Islamic art, and those working in Islamic sciences—particularly in terms of elucidating the dialectical relationship between revelation and its source—to this subject. We hope to encourage new studies that will shed light on at least some aspects of "Mecca's dark ages." While we employ descriptive (*definition*) and explanatory (*description*) methods in this study, we generally adopt a *critical* tone.

Words Meaning "House" In Arabic

One of the most reliable ways to trace 7th-century Meccan houses is to examine the words used for "house" as reflected in Qur'anic verses. The primary words for "house" in the Qur'an are *bayt, dār, manzil*, and *maskan*. The word *bayt*, which means "to marry" or "to settle," is fundamentally related to the verb *bāta*, meaning "to spend the night," and both usages frequently appear in the Qur'an (Azhari 1964, vol. XIV, p. 334; Jawhari 1956, vol. I, p. 245). *Bayt* is used not only for human dwellings but also for tents and animal shelters. It refers to the Kaaba as well as to structures like it (Abdülbâqî 1364, p. 138). The word *manzil*, derived from the verb *nazala* (to descend), was used by Arabs to denote the place where a guest "alights" or stays (Isfahani n.d., p. 488). The word *dār*, which has entered Turkish as *devir* (cycle) and *daire* (circle), is also used in the Qur'an (Isfahani n.d., p. 174).

Another word not found in the Qur'an but used in hadiths to mean "house" is *rubʿa*, derived from *murabbaʿ* (quadrilateral), implying structures with angular shapes (Zabidi 1965, vol. XXI, p. 22; İbn Manzûr n.d. p. 1563). Given that the Kaaba is cubic and most tents are circular, the emergence of the word *rubʿa* becomes somewhat understandable. These words are often used synonymously. For example, in one hadith, the words *dār* and *rubʿa* are used interchangeably, while in another, they are distinguished (Bayhaqi 1988, vol. V, p. 92). "The Hill group would not enter through the door of a *dār* or the door of a *bayt*" (Ibn Habib 1942, p. 180).

The words *bayt* and *dār* appear frequently in the Qur'an, while *maskan* and *manzil* are less common. These usages include references to: houses as places of rest and tranquility granted by God (16:80); the houses (*buyūt*) that Moses and Aaron were commanded to build for the Israelites in Egypt as places of worship (10:87); the houses of past nations destroyed for their disbelief, despite their splendid construction (30:9); the houses of ʿĀd and Thamūd, skillfully carved into rocks (7:74; 15:82; 26:149); the houses of the people of Sheba, surrounded by gardens on both sides (34:15); the collapse of roofs and walls in destroyed cities, leaving grand palaces empty (22:45); and the palace-like house (*sarḥ*) that Solomon prayed for and which Queen Sheba mistook for water due to its glossy floor (27:44; 38:35). The word *maskan* appears in the Qur'an in contexts such as the pleasant dwellings of the people of Sheba in Yemen (34:15), the condemnation of preferring homes over God, His Messenger, and striving in His cause (9:24), and the promise of delightful dwellings in the gardens of Eden for believing men and women (9:72; 61:12). The Qur'an also instructs, "House them according to your means" (65:6).

Although these words generally mean "house," their implications are not entirely clear. For example, *dār* can mean "hell" (14:28), "paradise" (16:30), or "the city of Madinah " (59:9)[vii]. The phrase *dār al-ākhira* (the abode of the Hereafter) appears nine times in the Qur'an, aligning more with "the abode of the Hereafter" than "the house of the Hereafter." (2/94; 6/32; 7/169; 12/109; 16/30; 28/77, 83; 29/64; 33/29) Its counterpart, *dār al-dunyā*, does not appear in the Qur'an; instead, *ḥayāt al-dunyā* is used. Similarly, *bayt* and *maskan* have ambiguous usages. While *bayt* primarily refers to the Kaaba, it is also used for animal shelters (29:41), a house in paradise (66:11), and tents made from animal hides (16:80). *Maskan* can mean "ant nest" (27:18) or "paradise" (9:72).

As observed, there is a degree of fluidity between the usages of these terms, making it difficult to establish a definitive distinction. Oleg Grabar notes that the words *bayt* and *dār* in the Quran exhibit ambiguous applications (Grabar 2001, vol. I, p. 163). This ambiguity may be closely related to the state of housing in 7th-century Mecca.

Although the term *maskan* (dwelling) is not used here, we think that the words *bayt*, *dār*, and *rubʿ* cannot refer to large, multi-chambered houses. As will be discussed shortly, it is known that 7th-century Mecca lacked structures substantial

enough to be described as "miniature palaces." Moreover, terms such as *qaṣr* and *ṣaḥn*, which denote palatial structures, appear in the Quran and hadiths predominantly in an eschatological context rather than about worldly architecture. However, the use of the word *rubʿa* as an equivalent for Turkish terms like *konak* (mansion), *köşk* (pavilion), or *saray* (palace) likely stems from an anachronistic perspective. There is no evidence to suggest that palatial or mansion-like structures existed in 7th-century Mecca—or even in the broader Hijaz region during that period.

Y. Vehbi Yavuz, the Turkish translator of al-Azraqī's *Akhbār Makka*, curiously renders all instances of tribal *rubʿa*s as *konak* (mansion/manor house). Yet, the lexical meaning of the term does not appear to support such a translation. Yavuz's rendition reads:

"Qusay assigned them mansions (konak)." (p. 571) (وخط لهم الرباع) (p. 889).

An average Turkish reader encountering this phrasing would likely envision either Ottoman-era mansions or imagine 7th-century Mecca as resembling 10th-century Baghdad.[viii] However, it seems highly improbable that a society in its most primitive stage—one that, during Qusay's time, had barely progressed beyond cutting down trees to build makeshift huts—would have begun its architectural development with *konak*s (mansion/manor house), the most advanced form of residential structure.[ix]

The Prophet and The Houses of Mecca

Especially in social and political matters, hadiths have led to various interpretations, and the Prophet is often treated as if he were a modern figure—a great statesman, politician, economist, or even a city planner. One such anachronistic interpretation is the attribution of urban planning to him, particularly for his actions in Madinah.[x] For this general judgment to hold, it cannot be based solely on the Madinah period; there should also be evidence of similar actions during the half-century he spent in Mecca. However, as far as we can see, no such evidence exists. Most of the available information pertains to the Madinah period, and since we are not focusing on that, we will review the Prophet's sayings about the city, particularly regarding houses, in the Meccan context.

In reality, 7th-century Mecca, where the Prophet lived for nearly half a century, cannot be said to have possessed a true urban identity. If the Kaaba and sacred spaces are excluded, little remains of the city. Unfortunately, early sources are not very helpful regarding the architecture of Meccan houses. The available data do not allow for a complete urban design. If there had been significant information about urban planning, it would surely have been reflected in the sources. However, based on this assumption, it is still possible to make a conjectural design using fragmented pieces of information. Two primary source categories are instrumental for this investigation: first, meticulous scholarly analyses of Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and critical

evaluations of relevant historical accounts in classical texts; second, specialized monographic works on Mecca and Madinah, particularly sīra literature with topographical considerations. Regarding Meccan urban history, these sources present inherent limitations as they predominantly examine the Kaʿba within a sacred paradigm, privileging its cultic significance over systematic documentation of urban fabric, thereby complicating comprehensive reconstruction of the city's spatial organization.

First, some information from hadith sources will be presented without interpretation, followed by questions and intermediate comments on what these sayings might mean. For example, in a hadith narrated by ʿĀʾisha, when the Prophet was asked about building a house in Mina for shade, he replied, "No, it belongs to the first comer" (Abu Dawud 2009, "Manasık", 90). Another hadith states, "Selling or consuming the rent of Meccan houses is forbidden. Whoever consumes the rent of Meccan houses has only filled his belly with fire (Darakutni 2004, vol. IV, p. 12). " A variant of this hadith says, 'It is not permissible to rent Meccan houses'" (Ibn Abu Shayba 1409, vol. III, p. 329; Daraqutni 2004, vol. IV, p. 13). In Ibn Mājah, a hadith mentions that Meccan houses should be given free of charge to those in need, even after the deaths of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ʿUmar (Qazwini 2009, "Menâsik", 102).

In Ezrāqī's *Akhbār Makka*, under the heading "The Prohibition of Renting and Selling Meccan Houses" (Azraqi 2003, p. 487), similar narrations are found, most of which are relatively easy to interpret as they were uttered around the time of the conquest of Mecca (Eryılmaz 2021, p. 909). However, how should we interpret the following widely known hadith found in most hadith collections, including the *Kutub al-Sitta*:

"There is bad omen in three things: the horse, the woman, and the house"? (انما الشؤم في ثلاثة، في الفرس والمرأة ***والدار***.) (Buhkari 2001, Cihad 47; Abu Dawud 2009, Tıp, 24).

While the hadith is clear, modern interpreters, attributing to the text what it does not say, reinterpret it as, "If there were bad omen in three things, it would be in the woman, the horse, and the house." Unfortunately, this interpretation does not salvage the text but complicates it further. Such attempts at interpretation are less plausible than the classical hadith commentators' explanations that "the narrator misheard" or "transmitted it incompletely." While classical scholars built their explanations on human error, modern interpreters impose on the text what they believe the speaker "intended to say," thereby attributing falsehoods to the Prophet (Ibn Qutayba 1999, pp. 168-171).

How should we interpret the following statement in Ezrāqī's record: "When he (the Prophet) performed the circum-ambulation of the *bayt*, he would ascend to the upper part of Mecca and look down, grieving over the buildings"? (فاضطرب به الابنية) (Azraqi 2003, p. 745). Without considering the context, this statement might seem to reflect the Prophet's concern for the city's architecture. However, it would be forced to explain this as an expression of the Prophet's urban sensibility. This statement,

made around the time of the conquest of Mecca, is more likely an expression of longing by someone who, after being forcibly expelled from his homeland, returned to Mecca for the first time in years.

As another example of urban sensibility regarding Meccan houses, when the Meccan migrants' houses were confiscated by Abū Sufyān, he seized a house belonging to the family of his nephew Jaḥsh and sold it for 100 dinars. After the conquest of Mecca, Abū Aḥmad b. Jaḥsh complained to the Prophet about Abū Sufyān selling his house. The Prophet whispered something in his ear, and he became content. When asked what was said, he replied, "He told me, 'If you are patient, it is better for you. For this house, you will have a house in paradise'" (Azraqi 2003, pp. 875-876). This narration emphasizes that worldly houses are insignificant compared to the reward of a house in paradise.

A well-known incident involving the Prophet and Meccan houses occurred during the Farewell Pilgrimage. When some companions asked him where he would stay in Mecca, he responded with great sorrow, "Has ʿAqīl left us any houses?" (وهل ترك عقيل من رباع او دور) and then said, "Tomorrow, God willing, we will stay near Banū Kināna—that is, in the valley of Muḥaṣṣab—where the Quraysh swore their oath of disbelief" (Buhkari 2001, “Hac”, 44; Azraqi 2003, p. 486). How should we interpret the Prophet's reaction to his cousin ʿAqīl? Undoubtedly, as in the earlier statement about "grieving over the buildings," this was an expression of sorrow upon returning to Mecca after years of absence, faced with the only remaining memory of his past.[xi]

As seen, the information in the sources about the Prophet and Meccan houses comes from the post-conquest Madinah period. As far as we can see, we could not find any information in the sources about the Meccan period. Therefore, if the Prophet had any urban design, there would surely have been some mention of it during the more than ten years of the Meccan period and the pre-prophetic era of his first forty years. If such information exists but is not reflected in the sources, it means that, in the context of Meccan houses, this period remains shrouded in a thick veil of darkness. The only known fact about pre-Islamic Meccan houses is that the first construction activities began during the time of Quṣayy. The houses of Mecca in the first quarter of the 7th century, during the Prophet's lifetime, do not appear to have advanced significantly beyond the construction activities of Quṣayy, who lived about a century and a half earlier.

The External Appearance of Meccan Houses

Some classical sources touch on architecture under independent headings (imara) but these are insufficient. For example, Qalqashandī's (d. 821/1418) encyclopedic work *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* provides such information about Meccan houses (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. I, p. 426). In more modern works, such as Jawād ʿAlī's *al-Mufaṣṣal*, under the heading "houses" (*buyūt*), the information largely pertains to tent-style houses, with only passing references to stone and mud-brick buildings (Buhkari, 2001, Menâkıp, 18). Moreover, in the section on houses, the author discusses Arab

customs such as nighttime gatherings, eating and drinking, and clothing, which suggests a lack of substantial material on the topic. Jawād ʿAlī states:

"Our knowledge about Meccan houses is quite rudimentary. We hardly know anything about them." (فلا نكاد نعرف شيئا عن بيوت مكة) (Jawad Ali 1993, vol. V, p.16).

Another modern author, Ālūsī (d. 1924), in his work *Bulūgh al-Arab*, similarly provides little information.[xii] However, he notes that "Arabs preferred living in tents to living in splendid palaces and adorned houses " (البيت لاهل البوادي احب لديهم من القصور المشيدة والبيوت المزخرفة), which offers some insight into the topic (Âlûsî 1925, vol. I, p. 184).

Most of the discussions on this subject revolve around tent-style houses. Before delving into these, let us note that the Qur'an and the Prophet's hadiths also refer to such houses. For example, Surah al-Naḥl states:

"Allah has made for you, from the hides of animals, houses (*buyūt*)." (وَاللهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ سَكَنًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ جُلُودِ الْأَنْعَامِ بُيُوتًا) (16/80).

As will be seen shortly, one of the many types of tent houses in Mecca was made from hides. Similarly, Surah al-Raḥmān depicts the dwellings of paradise as tents:

"Fair ones, close-guarded in pavilions." (حُورٌ مَقْصُورَاتٌ فِي الْخِيَامِ) (55/72).

The Qur'an's emphasis on tents is also reflected in the Prophet's hadiths. For example, a hadith in Dārimī states:

"There are tents for the martyrs beneath the Throne." (فذالك الشهيد الممتحن في خيمة الله تحت عرشه) (Darımi 2000, "Cihad" 20).

It appears that the majority of 7th-century Meccan houses were tent-style. The word *ḥujra* (room), used in the Qur'an (49:4), refers to non-tent houses and was likely of Yemeni origin (Jawad Ali 1993, vol. V, p. 10).

The diversity of words for "tent" in Arabic is astonishingly vast compared to the limited vocabulary for stone and wooden structures. Some words meaning "tent" include: *khiyām, bayt, surādiq, ḥaẓīra, ghubāb, madrab, ḥifsh, hibā, hijād, miẓalla, qash, ṭirāf, sard, fusṭāṭ, qubba, dihlīz, jabābīb, junbūza, ḥajala, ghunna, jaʿd, sawt*. As seen, the word *bayt* also has meanings related to tents.

There were dozens of types of tents and pavilions, including those made from hair (*miẓalla*), camel wool (*jaʿd*), stone (*ghunna*), wool (*hibā*), wood (*khayma*), and high-quality leather (*qubba*) (Isfahani n.d., p. 83; Buhkari 2001, Manaqıb, *26;* Zabidi 1965, vol. III, p. *21*). The most famous and widespread were the *Red Mudar tents* (Faqıhi 1994, vol. V, p. 152; Ibn Sa'd 2001, vol. I, p. 72). The *ghubāb* were dome-shaped tents used by the Quraysh, particularly in Mina. Another type, *madrab*, was tents erected with portable poles, not made from hair. Larger tents were called *surādiq* (Faqıhi 1994, vol. IV, p. 150; Âlûsî 1925, vol. III, p. 393). The Qur'an also references these dome-like (18/29), circular tents, which were larger and resembled pavilions.

The wealthy and elite lived in these. Made from cotton, they were likely inspired by Persian designs. The smallest tent type was called *sawt*. The *hibā* tents had two or three poles, while the *bayt* could have six to nine poles. Tents could contain multiple rooms (Jewad Ali 1993, vol. V, p. 5-8; Âlûsî 1925, vol. III, p. 393-395).

Ḥuṣṣ tents, made from wood or reeds, were common but flimsy. These hut-like houses were tied together with poles. Although practical, they were prone to collapse. The Prophet once passed by people repairing such a hut, offering a glimpse into the living conditions (Abu Dawud 2009, "Adab", *172*).

Canopy-style houses were another category. The *khayma*, mentioned in the Qur'an (55:72), were relatively larger houses built near valleys (Zabidi, 1965, vol. XXXII, p. 131; Âlûsî 1925, vol. III, p. 393). Another type was the *ḥaẓīra* (Çelikkol 22014, p. 94), made from tree branches and leaves, where most people lived. *Ḥaẓīra* could also refer to animal shelters. Today, imagining the convenience of portable houses produced by modern technology, it is easy to understand how the dozens of tent and canopy-style houses in 7th-century Mecca provided great comfort in harsh desert conditions.

The distinction between *ahl al-wabar* (tent-dwellers) and *ahl al-madar* (stone/mud-brick dwellers) seems more a later classification than a contemporary one. Generally, *ahl al-wabar* lived in tents, while *ahl al-madar* lived in stone or wooden houses. Another distinction labels those outside Mecca as *ahl al-wabar* and those in the center as *ahl al-madar*, but this seems forced. At least during the Prophet's time, there is no evidence of such a clear distinction. This classification should not be rigid, as both types of houses existed in Mecca.

Apart from tents and canopies, there were houses made of stone, earth, reeds, and mud. Stone and mud-brick houses were more common in Madinah. ʿĀʾisha's chamber in Madinah is described as square, built from black stone and mud-brick (Ibn Zabala, 2018, p. 51). There were also a few wooden houses, but the lack of forests in Mecca and its arid, infertile land limited the number of trees available for construction. The same can be said for stone structures. Given the Meccans' lack of knowledge about static construction, these stone houses must have been quite rudimentary. Stone and wooden houses were more likely found in regions closer to the Hijaz, such as Abyssinia and Yemen. In Mecca, only the very wealthy could afford to bring craftsmen from Abyssinia to build stone houses, or the houses they built themselves were likely very crude. Interestingly, the use of clay and mud as mortar was prohibited by the Prophet (likely during the Madinah period).

There are records of mats being used in house construction. Meccan houses resembled more a medium-sized town reflecting tribal organization than a city. There was no order whatsoever. What existed were mostly portable houses or larger tent arrangements. Some houses were made from a few trees or reeds and tied to poles for stability. These were essentially huts. Houses made from tree branches and leaves, or canopy-style structures, were where the majority lived. There were also simple mud-

brick houses called *kubbat* (Âlûsî 1925, vol. III, p. 393-395). Mud-brick houses were called *qubba*, as seen in hadiths like "Turkish dome" (Buhkari 2001, "Hacc" 64; Ibn Maja 2009, "Siyam", 62). These houses likely had a few rooms. A few stone houses were called *jabābīb*, and dome-topped (circular) buildings were called *junbūza* (Faqıhi 1994, vol. V, p. 106; Ibn Manzur n.d., p. 695).

The houses did not have a building-like appearance because the Meccans considered it an insult to the Kaaba to build houses taller than it. This tradition persisted for many years. If anyone dared, their house would be forcibly demolished. After the conquest of Mecca, Shayba b. ʿUthmān (d. 59/679), son of ʿUthmān b. Ṭalḥa, who was given the keys to the Kaaba, took arbitrary and harsh measures in this regard. He would climb to a high place and demolish any house taller than the Kaaba (Azraqi 2003, p. 272).

Similarly, houses were not built facing the Kaaba out of respect. The Quraysh also avoided building square houses because the Kaaba was square, fearing misfortune if they did. However, this custom was eventually broken, and a man named Warqaʿ al-Khuzāʿī is said to have built a square house (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. 1, p. 426). The poet Humayd b. Dhuhayr was criticized in some poems for being the first to build a square house:

"Humayd made his house four-cornered / For him, it will be either death or error" (Faqıhi 1994, vol. III, p. 221; Jawad Ali 1993, Vol. IV, p. 51).

The Arabs' reservations about constructing buildings—whether out of reverence for the Kaʿba or fear of calamity—cannot be explained solely by a sense of sacred devotion. As previously noted, Ibn Khaldūn touches upon this matter.

Most accounts in the sources regarding the houses of Mecca do not pertain to the Prophet's era but rather to the legendary founder Qusay's time, which depict a rather primitive setting. One of the earliest records, from al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), states:

"There were no built houses in Mecca initially" (ولم يكن بها منازل مبنية في بدء الأمر) (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. IV, p. 250).

Mecca's earliest settlers were nomadic tribes living in tents scattered around the Zamzam well and along the valley. The fact that the Jurhum and Khuzaʿa tribes—who inhabited the area before Qusay—refrained from building houses out of reverence for the Kaʿba supports al-Kalbī's observation. The area around the Kaʿba was initially empty, devoid of any dwellings. Thus, a place without houses could hardly be called a city. Modern sociology acknowledges that rural migrants adapt slowly to urban life, often requiring generations to truly assimilate. Some foreign scholars emphasize that no true city existed around the Kaʿba before Qusay (Caetani 2020, vol. I, p. 195).

Al-Kalbī's statement, however, leaves unexplained gaps regarding the *Bayt Allāh* (Kaʿba), which the Quran explicitly associates with Abraham and Ishmael's

construction (3:96). Yet, the Quran's emphasis is on the sanctuary, not residential structures.

Debates about who built Mecca's first inhabitable house suggest it likely postdated Qusay. When Qusay opened the area around the Kaʿba for settlement, he and others began constructing houses. The Jurhum and Khuzaʿa reportedly avoided building near the Kaʿba due to its sanctity. The surrounding area was wooded, and cutting trees for construction was taboo—until Qusay boldly felled trees to build *Dār al-Nadwa*, encouraging others to follow. These early houses were likely rudimentary, as the desert's quintessential dwelling was the tent. Sources note that most of these structures soon collapsed (قد هدم اكثره), leaving only the Kaʿba standing (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. IV, p. 250).

Ibn Khaldūn underscores Arabs' ineptitude in architecture, attributing it to their "uncivilized" nature: they lacked knowledge of stone or wood construction and even dismantled buildings to obtain materials for hearths or tents. He concludes:

"Thus, the very nature of their existence opposed the foundation of urbanization" (فصارت طبيعة وجودهم منافية للبناء الذي هو اصل العمران) (Ibn Khaldun 2004, vol. I, p. 287).

It must be stated here that the Arabs' preconceptions regarding sacred spaces, as exemplified by the Ka'ba, had their limits. Historical accounts record that the Amalekites and later the Jurhum tribe demolished the Ka'ba, indicating it was destroyed and rebuilt twice before Qusay's time. Furthermore, it collapsed again when the Prophet was approximately 25 years old, and was subsequently destroyed during Abdullah ibn Zubayr's era (d. 73/692). These repeated destructions demonstrate that the Meccans' reservations about sacred spaces were not particularly sensitive or absolute.

The Ka'ba during Qusay's time is described as "a roofless structure without a ceiling" (ولم يجعل لها سقفا) (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. IV, p. 250). Later accounts indicate its roof was covered with thatch and similar materials. Notably, during the Prophet's lifetime, when a Byzantine ship wrecked near Jeddah, the Quraysh transported its wooden remnants to Mecca and managed to construct only a rudimentary roof for the Ka'ba (Qalqashandi 1922, vol. IV, p. 251). Significantly, although the Ka'ba was built of stone and brick, its historical practice of being entirely draped in fabric likely reflects the deep-rooted Bedouin cultural connection to tent dwellings."

In fact, the second major wave of housing development in Mecca after Qusay occurred not during the Prophet's era as commonly assumed, but rather during Mu'awiya's reign. Historical sources indicate that Mu'awiya commissioned the construction of numerous houses in Mecca (Ibn Shabba 1979, vol. I, p. 256). Given his well-documented acquisition of multiple properties in the city, it becomes evident that his building projects primarily served as political investments aimed at consolidating power.

The historical record contains no evidence of two-story buildings in 7th-century Mecca. While fragmentary references suggest some houses contained ground-level animal shelters, there is similarly no indication of substantial livestock husbandry during this period. Multi-story structures appear to have been limited to Madinah, where, according to accounts, three-story stone houses - predominantly inhabited by Jewish residents - existed when the Prophet migrated there. Although sources poetically describe Abu Sufyan's Madinah residence as "reaching towards the heavens" (ذاهبة في السماء), such hyperbolic descriptions reflect literary exaggeration rather than architectural reality (Buhkari, 2001, “Fiten” 25; Ibn Maja 2009, Fiten, 25). This interpretation finds support in hadith literature, where the Prophet's critical remarks about tall buildings suggest his negative view of such ostentatious constructions (Yamani 2014, p. 125).

Certain sources contain exaggerated descriptions regarding the size of houses that surpass reasonable estimations. These include claims about the spaciousness of Arqam's house, where early Muslims gathered for Quranic instruction, being exceptionally large to accommodate crowds, or assertions that Khadīja's residence at the time of her marriage to the Prophet contained 9-10 rooms to house her six children, Ali ibn Abi Talib, her slave Maysara, and additionally serve as a commercial space (Yaqut al-Hamawi 1977, vol. V, p. 185; Jawad Ali 1993, vol. V, p. 23). However, we maintain that such claims require verification and should be approached with critical scrutiny.

Similarly, sources emphasize the grandeur of Abdullah ibn Jud'an's house in Mecca. In fact, his residence appears to be the only well-documented domestic structure from the post-Qusay period in Meccan historical records. As a wealthy merchant who amassed his fortune through caravan trade and particularly the slave trade - and who was also a cousin of Abu Bakr's father - ibn Jud'an held significant status in Meccan history, especially through his involvement in the Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl during the Jahiliyya period (Jawad Ali 1993, vol. V, p. 23). Historical accounts written approximately a decade after the Prophet's first revelation lavish praise on ibn Jud'an's residence, describing meals served in gold and silver vessels featuring exotic dishes prepared by chefs imported from Iraq (İbn Hawkal 2014. p. 38). The house reportedly contained specialized quarters for guests, male and female slaves, singing girls, other servants, and even animals. Additional accounts mention his employment of two town criers who would indiscriminately invite people to his table. However, these descriptions appear incongruent with the socio-economic realities of 7th century Mecca. Hosting pilgrims and Meccan residents during Hajj season would not necessarily require an exceptionally large residence by contemporary standards. In our assessment, such hospitality could have been managed without the architectural grandeur described. Rather, ibn Jud'an's legendary open tables, generous provisions, and gift-giving - immortalized in the qaṣīdas of poets like Umayya b. Abi al-Ṣalt - likely contributed more to his reputation among Meccans than any physical attributes of his dwelling."

An examination of the external characteristics of Meccan houses must consider their spatial organization within the city's street and neighborhood system. In this context, the term *shi'b* - Mecca's equivalent of "neighborhood" - proves instructive. However, given its literal meaning as "the space between two mountains," *shi'b* does not precisely correspond to modern conceptions of streets or residential quarters. Mecca contained several *shi'bs*, the most famous being *Shi'b Abi Talib* - the area where the Hashimids were confined following the deaths of Abu Talib and Khadija. This three-year blockade effectively created a quarantine zone containing the clan's residences (Şenyayla 2021, pp. 291-323). Notably, historical sources provide no architectural description of this area, focusing instead on the sequence of events: the prohibition of food and marriage relations, subsequent attempts by relatives to breach the embargo, and its eventual termination when a worm consumed the boycott document hung on the Ka'ba. This narrative emphasis on social dynamics rather than physical space suggests that the houses themselves held no remarkable architectural features worth documenting. The absence of spatial descriptions in accounts of *Shi'b Abi Talib* likely reflects the unremarkable nature of its dwellings rather than mere oversight by chroniclers.

The available historical evidence contains no indication of two-story buildings in Mecca, and the existence of multi-story structures remains highly doubtful. Primary sources typically classify dwellings according to the fundamental distinction between *ahl al-wabar* (tent dwellers) and *ahl al-madar* or *ahl al-hajar* (inhabitants of stone or mudbrick houses) – a categorization that proves particularly revealing for architectural analysis. This terminology, notably present in the Prophet's hadith literatüre (Buhkari 2001, Meğazi, 28; Darımi 2000, Mukaddime, 14), appears to reference the external physical characteristics of living spaces.

Significantly, the most reliable method for reconstructing the exterior features involves first examining their interior composition. A precise understanding of a dwelling's contents (and equally importantly, its absences) enables more accurate projections about its external architectural form. This analytical approach reflects the fundamental interconnection between domestic space and material culture in reconstructing historical built environments.

The Interior of Meccan Houses

The interiors of 7th-century Meccan houses reflected deprivation as much as their exteriors. For instance, there were no *toilets*—a basic necessity in any home (Jawad Ali 1993, vol. V, p. 33). The Meccans relieved themselves naturally wherever they could. People sought open areas for their needs, as the word *ḥalāʾ* (toilet) itself means "open space" (Ibn Manzûr n.d., p. 1255). Some records suggest they went outside the sacred precincts, but counterexamples exist. A hadith found in all major collections, like *Kutub al-Sitta*, describes a Bedouin urinating inside the mosque, prompting the Prophet to order water to be poured over the spot.

“a Bedouin entered and urinated in a corner of the mosque. When people moved to stop him, the Prophet (peace be upon him) prevented them from intervening. After the Bedouin finished relieving himself, the Prophet ordered that a large bucket of water be poured over the area, which was then done." (جاء أعرابِيٌّ، فبَالَ في طَائِفَة المَسجد، فَزَجَرَه النَّاسُ، فَنَهَاهُمُ النبِيُّ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَلَمَّا قَضَى بَولَه أَمر النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بِذَنُوب من ماء، فَأُهرِيقَ عليه) (Buhkari 2001, “Vudû” 58, “Edeb” 80; Ibn Maja 2009, “Taharet” 78).

Hadith sources contain numerous records indicating the absence of dedicated toilet facilities in Meccan households. One particularly noteworthy account, directly involving the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself, reveals domestic sanitation practices among the Quraysh. A narration documented in Abu Dawud states:

"The Prophet (pbuh) would relieve himself into a wooden vessel made of palm fibers kept beneath his bed, which he would then return to its place under the bedframe" (كان للنبي صلعم قدح من عيدان يبول فيه و يضعه تحت السرير) (Abu Dawud 2009, Taharet 23)

Historical sources indicate that Meccans used specific areas of the city for toilet needs. The records particularly mention places called Fadih, Mughshi, and Mughammas (Azraqi 2003, p. 911).

Without toilets, there were no *baths* either (Jawad Ali 1993, vol. 5, p. 32 and 33). In the pre-Islamic period, the Prophet’s uncle Zubayr b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib’s house was said to have contained a bath (Baladhuri 1996, vol. 2, p. 283), and Muʿāwiya later installed one in a house he acquired from the Banū ʿĀmir tribe. Even if true (Azraqi, 2003, p. 593), these were likely primitive. The Prophet washed in a large basin behind a curtain of mats or cloth in his home (Canan 1992, vol. III, p. 191).

The houses in Mecca did not have a dedicated kitchen area as we understand it today. Archaeological evidence suggests that recesses carved into walls or bench-like structures - either hand-carved or made with digging tools - served kitchen functions. In the absence of proper kitchens, randomly arranged stones sometimes functioned as makeshift shelves for kitchenware (Tabari 1967, vol. II, p. 369). Naturally, without kitchens, there were no formal dining arrangements either. Meals were typically eaten on floor mats woven from palm fronds and leaves. Wooden plates and bowls were commonly used, and since forks and spoons were absent, people ate with their hands (Hamidullah 2006, vol. II, p. 1060).

These material absences were compounded by a far more fundamental architectural deficiency: the houses lacked doors. The Meccans had no cultural tradition of entering dwellings through doorways, and consequently, door locks were nonexistent. The sociological implications of this absence—particularly regarding privacy in what should be the most intimate space of a dwelling—cannot be explained solely by the security provided by the Haram precinct. Historical records indicate that the installation of doors in Meccan houses did not begin until well after the Prophet's death, during the caliphate of Umar (d. 23/644) (Azraqi 2003, p. *69*; Faqıhi 1994, vol. 3, p. *349*). Notably, Mu'awiya is documented as the first individual to install a door

in his house—a development likely influenced by his experiences in Syria (Faqıhi 1994, vol. III, p. *349*).

Windows were equally absent in these dwellings. The first recorded instance of a windowed house belongs to Yazid b. Warqa' al-Huzai, whose name has been preserved in the sources. This raises an essential question: can a structure without windows truly be considered a house? Moreover, the term "window" in this context diverges significantly from modern conceptions. Rather than being systematically designed for ventilation and illumination, these openings were crudely fashioned—referred to as *kawwa* (from which the Turkish *kevgir*, or "colander," derives)—essentially serving as perforations in the structure.

Lighting was another deficiency. There were no *lamps* or any tools for illumination. The Qur'an's negative portrayal of nighttime darkness (113:3) may reflect this absence. People likely relied on burning palm fronds or brushwood. Later sources, like al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), list 14 types of Arab lighting methods, but these postdate 7th-century Mecca (Nuwayri 2004, vol. I, p. 102). Oil lamps (*miṣbāḥ*) appear in later records, but ʿĀʾisha's statement is unequivocal:

"There were no lamps at that time." (والبيوت يومئذ ليس مصابيح) (Buhkari 2001, "Salat", 22).

Historical records suggest some modest improvements in living conditions toward the end of the Madinah period. Even the Prophet's Mosque was initially illuminated solely by burning palm branches. However, sources report that Tamīm al-Dārī introduced oil lamps from the Levant during the Prophet's lifetime to light the mosque (Ibn Athir 2012, vol. I, p. 256; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani 1853, vol. I, p. 191; Ibn Maja 2009, "Mesâcid", 9; Abu Dawud 2009, Salat, 14) —a development corroborated by early accounts like those of Ibn Zabāla (d. 199/814), who documented the presence of lamps in the mosque (İbn Zebâle 2018, p. 80).

Within these materially constrained domestic environments, archaeological and textual evidence suggests that domestic shrines were typically relegated to peripheral or ad hoc spaces rather than purpose-built cultic installations. The documented presence of idols (Isāf and Nā'ila) within the domicile of al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 32/653) (al-Azraqī, 2003: 552) establishes an irrefutable cultic-domestic nexus, though the atypical social standing of this particular household cautions against extrapolating this as normative practice. This spatial configuration of domestic piety reflects both the pragmatic adaptation to limited living quarters and the fluid boundaries between sacred and profane spheres in pre-Islamic domestic architecture. Claims about pre-Islamic houses having separate rooms for idols—or later, for prayer—are likely exaggerated (Çelikkol 2014, p. 89). The use of Arqam b. Abī al-Arqam's house as a mosque should be understood within its specific context as a gathering place for early Muslims, not as evidence of dedicated prayer rooms in homes. References to Abū Bakr constructing a mosque in his courtyard for prayer,

Quran recitation, and communal gatherings with women and children (Ibn Ishaq 2004, p. 266) are more likely to pertain to the Madinah period rather than Mecca.

Evaluation

Indeed, it is clear that when time and space are considered sacred, the objects within them must also be regarded as sacred. Just as the person, place, and time connected to the sacred transcend the ordinary—becoming distinct and contrasting with the mundane—so too do objects take on symbolic meaning as representations of the transcendent. When time and space enter the realm of the sacred, everything within these categories naturally becomes sanctified (Eliade, 1991, p. 4). The beliefs of the Arabs regarding Mecca as a city and their conceptions of houses within it derive meaning from this framework of sacredness and were not at all unusual within their historical context. Many customs that seem strange to us today were meaningful and entirely ordinary under the natural conditions of that era. This article particularly highlights the error in treating Mecca as a modern city a tendency stemming from the Quran's description of it as *Umm al-Qurā* and, consequently, the mistake of portraying the Prophet as an urban planner.

The Meccans held *primitive beliefs* about houses. Homes were fraught with omens. For example, they avoided entering through doors for superstitious reasons, a practice the Qur'an critiques (2:189). *Ahl al-madar* (sedentary Arabs) would knock holes in walls or climb over them, while *Ahl al-wabar* (nomads) crawled under their tents. This reveals a society unfamiliar with basic domestic etiquette. The Qur'anic injunctions on seeking permission to enter homes (4:27–29) and the Prophet's related hadiths were revolutionary for their time (Buhkari 2001, "İstiˀz̲ân", 13). A house, by its very nature, is a place that becomes dirty and accumulates waste. After eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking, certain refuse must be cleaned and disposed of. There are hadiths from the Prophet stating that unremoved trash becomes a gathering place for devils (Ibn Hanbal 1995, vol. V, p. 262), as well as reports that believer jinn reside in homes where the Quran is recited, while disbeliever jinn dwell in those where it is not (Süyûtî 1998, vol. I, p. 175). Household pests—particularly snakes—were also believed to be jinn. To protect themselves from these beings, the Meccans reportedly hung rabbits' feet (as amulets) (Âlûsî 1925, vol. II, p. 324). They believed that every house had its jinn, and when entering an old house, they would either bray like a donkey or carry a rabbit's foot to ward off the jinn's mischief before stepping inside.

As evidenced by the data presented above, the social living standards of 7th-century Meccans lagged far behind those of more advanced regions of their time. Mecca does not present an impressive image in terms of habitable structures. This is likely why Islamic sources do not discuss Mecca in terms of its architectural features or urban value, but rather emphasize its sacred significance (Grabar 2001, p. 162). The city's connection to Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail is highlighted, while its origins are traced back to Prophet Adam, and the association between Adam and Mecca is asserted as an absolute truth, undoubtedly for this very reason. To conclude,

let us offer a brief comparative perspective. While 7th-century Mecca had no means of illuminating its houses or streets, Ammianus—describing Antioch in the 4th century (around 360 CE)—remarked that *"at night, the glow of lamps rivaled daylight"* (Mumford 2007, p. 271). Similarly, around the time of the Prophet's birth, when Mecca was shrouded in darkness, Ephesus's Arcadian Street was a brilliantly lit city, illuminated by fifty lamps stretching *"as far as the Monument of the Wild Boar"* (Gates 2021, p. 514). The architectural sophistication of Ephesus predates not only the rise of Islam but even the time of Jesus. The Roman architect Vitruvius (15 BCE), in his work *On Architecture*, recounts an incident that sheds light on the city's advanced building standards:

- "In the renowned and distinguished Greek city of Ephesus, there was said to be an ancient law, strict yet fair, passed down from their ancestors. When an architect undertook the construction of a public building, he was required to provide a cost estimate. These estimates were submitted to the magistrate, and the architect's property was held as security until completion. If the final cost matched the estimate, the architect was honored with accolades and distinctions. If the project required an overrun of no more than one-fourth the original sum, the treasury covered the excess without penalty. However, if the overrun exceeded one-fourth, the additional funds were taken from the architect's own wealth. By the gods, if only such a law were applied in Rome—not just for public works but private homes as well! Then, only those properly trained in the scientific principles of architecture would practice the profession, while the incompetent would be barred. Gentlemen would be spared the ruinous extravagance that has even driven some from their mansions, and architects, fearing penalty, would calculate costs more meticulously. Thus, buildings could be completed within—or very close to—their projected budgets" (Vitruvius 2019. p. 205).

Conclusion

The limited information provided by early sources about 7th-century Meccan houses does not allow for a comprehensive reconstruction of their living environment. The greatest weakness of these accounts lies in the fact that early monographs on Mecca approach the subject from a post-*hijra* (Madinan) perspective. In other words, the available knowledge about Meccan houses primarily pertains to the period after the migration to Madinah. Information about the pre-*hijra* era is restricted to the time of Qusay, with no detailed descriptions found in hadith literature. Consequently, discussing pre-Islamic Meccan houses presents two major challenges: first, the scarcity of reliable sources, and second, the tendency to confine the topic within the sacred framework of the "Golden Age" narrative (*asr-ı saadet*), limiting objective historical analysis.

The houses of Mecca in the early 7th century did not present a favorable or advanced image. They lacked the most necessary items—toilets, baths, kitchens,

windows, and lighting. To what extent such deprived spaces can be called "houses" is debatable. The exterior of these dwellings suffered from similar deficiencies. Apart from the Kaaba, there were no notable structures in the city with distinctive architectural features. The so-called *Dār al-Nadwa*, built roughly one or two centuries before the Prophet's time, had no exceptional qualities beyond being an ordinary house. It is said that certain civic decisions and initiation ceremonies were held there, but no other significant locations are mentioned in the sources.

The absence of multi-story buildings in the 7th-century Mecca is well-documented, and even reports of some two-story houses with lower levels used as animal shelters should be treated with caution, given the limited prevalence of livestock breeding in the region. While some sources suggest that prominent Meccans hosted large banquets requiring spacious residences, such claims warrant scrutiny. Although Arabs were known for their hospitality and fondness for hosting feasts, particularly during the Hajj season, such gatherings did not necessarily require large or comfortable houses. The tradition of grand feasts could be accommodated without the need for expansive domestic spaces.

Although tents served as a distinguishing feature between nomadic and settled Arabs, and were indeed indispensable dwellings for desert-dwelling Bedouins, this criterion does not apply to pre-7th-century Meccan houses. The pre-Islamic Meccan environment does not appear to support such clear-cut distinctions. Consequently, there can be little doubt that tent-style dwellings were abundant in this period. The existence of dozens of distinct terms for tents in Arabic, along with the remarkable variety of tent types used as living spaces, provides crucial insight into how the region's inhabitants conceptualized domestic spaces. The frequently cited assertion that "Arabs preferred living in tents to residing in large houses or palaces" touches upon one of the most significant aspects of this cultural understanding of habitation.

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NOTES:

[i] Balādhurī's treatment of Mecca in the relevant section (Balādhuri 1987, p. 49) is narrowly confined to hydrological features—specifically wells and flood patterns—while conspicuously omitting any substantive discussion of urban morphology or domestic architecture.

[ii] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī discusses the city's name, customs, Abraham and his son, and the conquest of Mecca in his work. (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī 1977, vol. V, pp. 181-185).

[iii] Yaʿqūbī's historical work addresses Mecca only briefly in the context of the Kaʿba's construction, while his geographical account merely touches upon territorial boundaries and the route between Mecca and Yemen. (Yaqubi 2010, vol. I, p. 339; Yaqubi, n.d., p. 153-154).

[iv] In *Murūj al-dhahab*, Masʿūdī provides an extensive description of Mecca, yet offers no details regarding its domestic architecture. In *al-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, he merely discusses the conquest of Mecca and the Farewell Pilgrimage. (Masʿūdī 2005, vol. II, pp. 36-46; Mas’udi 1938, p. 230 and 238).

[v] Maqdisī in *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* classifies Mecca as a *miṣr* (metropolis), reflecting Arabic's settlement hierarchy where *qarya* denotes a village, *madīna* a town, and *miṣr* a major city. However, his account offers no substantial urban description beyond noting the religious prohibition against renting Meccan houses and briefly mentioning the sacred precincts. (Maqdisī 2002, pp. 83-88).

[vi] The following represent some examples of these works: Faruk Tuncer, 2023. “Ümmü'l-Kurâ Bağlamında Kur'ân'da Şehir Tasarımının İmkânı”. *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 34(1): 258-74. Jeremy Johns, “The House of the Prophet and the Concept of the Mosque”, *Bayt el-Maqdis, Jerusalem and Early Islam*, Oxford Students In Islamic Art, 9/2 (1999), 59-112. A. Zeki Yamani, *The House of Khadijah bint Huwaylid*, London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2014. Nebi Bozkurt, *Sünnet Verilerine Göre Hz. Peygamber Devrinde Hicaz Folkloru (Mesken)*, (unpublished PhD dissertation) İstanbul: MÜSBE, 1991. B. Uluengin & N. Uluengin, “Homes of Old Makkah”, *Aramco World*, (1993) vol. 44 Number 4, pp. 20-29, and *Bulent* Uluengin, *Geleneksel Mekke Evleri*. İstanbul: Yem Yayınları, 2022.

[vii] A ḥadīth recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* employs the term *"Dāru'l-hijra"* (abode of migration) for Madinah, mirroring the Qur'anic usage (72, 9:20). (المدينة فانها دار الهجرة والسنة والسلامة) (Bukhārī 2001, “Manakıb” 46).

[viii] Ab Şinasi Hisar (d. 1963), a seminal figure in Turkish literature renowned for his masterful depictions of the Istanbul Bosphorus, articulates the architectural distinctions among waterfront residences in his work *Boğaziçi Yalıları* (1968, p. 119): "Those situated along the Bosphorus shoreline, constructed of wood, were termed *yalı*; the wooden summer residences located in Istanbul's suburban districts and within groves were called *köşk*; while the urban dwellings, typically featuring separate quarters for men (*selamlık*) and women (*haremlik*), and often built of masonry (*kargir*), were designated as *konak*." This tripartite classification reflects both the socio-spatial organization of Ottoman domestic architecture and the nuanced terminology employed to denote status, function, and construction materials in late imperial residential structures.

[ix] The translator confesses to having conducted extensive research on these residences, yet ultimately abandoned the project after proving unable to locate a single one of the aforementioned structures. (Azraqi, 2003, p. 551).

[x] In his Turkish article *"Asr-ı Saadette Evler"* ("Houses in the Age of Felicity"), Nebi Bozkurt appropriates an architectural description from the Qur'anic account of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba as evidence for Arabian domestic architecture, stating: *"The Middle East was where glasswork was best known and likely originated. The Qur'an describes the magnificent crystal decoration in Solomon's palace (27:44) - so realistic that the Queen mistakes the glass floor for water and lifts her skirts. Such an advanced art must have left some legacy for subsequent generations."* (Bozkurt 1994, p. 23). This analysis commits two methodological errors: first, it overlooks the fundamental distinction between 6th-7th century Hijazi Arabs (who, while not asocial, existed outside contemporary civilizational norms) and the advanced Sabaean culture; second, it homogenizes "Arabs" by anachronistically applying Yemenite architectural marvels witnessed by Bilqīs as evidence for Hejazi dwellings during the Prophet's era.

[xi] The discussion here draws upon a limited number of narrations, with other accounts on the subject following a similar pattern. This issue is not confined to the Prophet alone; among Mecca's elite, both Companions and polytheistic Meccans provide examples of urban consciousness regarding Meccan houses. To maintain focus, we shall briefly examine two such cases: those of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Abū Jahl For instance, during his caliphate, ʿUmar reportedly clashed with Abū Sufyān over the latter's unauthorized paving of stones in front of his house. Despite ʿUmar's order for immediate removal, Abū Sufyān delayed until evening, claiming he awaited skilled masons rather than defying the command. This explanation only exacerbated ʿUmar's anger, leading him to strike Abū Sufyān's wife, Hind bint ʿUtba, with a stick when she intervened in defense of her husband (al-Azraqi 2003, p. 861). We refrain from adjudicating whether ʿUmar or Abū Sufyān was justified here. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) records that ʿUmar, when consulted by the people of Kufa about transitioning from reed huts to stone houses, advised: *"Build stone houses, but permit none to exceed three rooms, nor construct them tall. If you adhere to this sunna, you shall attain prosperity in both worlds"* (Ibn Khaldūn 2004, vol. II, p. 649). Another example involves Abū Jahl ibn Hishām, a prominent Meccan elite. Sources diverge regarding a house he owned: some state he gifted it to Ḥārith ibn Umayya over a poetic dispute, while others claim witnesses attested he sold it for a wineskin (Azraqi 2003, p. 874).

[xii] In his three-volume work, al-Ālūsī provides no information about Meccan houses under the sections titled *"Masākin al-ʿArab fī al-Jāhiliyya"* (Dwellings of the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era), *"Buyūtāt al-ʿArab"* (Houses of the Arabs), and *"Buyūt Ahl al-Bādiya min al-ʿArab"* (Dwellings of the Desert Arabs). Under *"Masākin al-ʿArab fī al-Jāhiliyya,"* he touches only on the houses of Arabs in Yemen and the Levant. The *"Buyūtāt al-ʿArab"* section discusses pre-Islamic Arab customs (Alusi 1925, vol. V, p. 189), while *"Buyūt Ahl al-Bādiya min al-ʿArab"* deals exclusively with tent dwellings (Alusi 1925, vol. III, p. 393).