



Islamic Jerusalem: The Islamic Heritage and A Model of Peaceful Co-Existence

^{i,ii,iii}*Seema Tahir

ⁱIslamic Studies (Hadith & its Sciences) Department, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

ⁱⁱIslamic Studies, Govt. Viqar UN Nisa Post Graduate College for Women, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

ⁱⁱⁱManarath Al Fazal International School, Makkah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

*(Corresponding author) e-mail: seema_tahir22@yahoo.com

Article history:

Submission date: 1 Nov 2024

Received in revised form: 12 Feb 2025

Acceptance date: 27 June 2025

Available online: 15 July 2025

Keywords:

Maqasid al-Shariah, Genetically Modified Foods, Halal Certification, Tayyib Principles, Bioethics

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interest:

The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

Cite as:

Seema Tahir. (2025). Islamic Jerusalem: The Islamic Heritage and A Model of Peaceful Co-Existence. *AL-MAQASID: The International Journal of Maqasid Studies and Advanced Islamic Research*, 6(1), 170–175. Retrieved from <https://irpublisher.com/almaqasid/index.php/journal/article/view/54>



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ABSTRACT

Islamic Jerusalem, or *Al-Quds*, holds a vital status for three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, all of which claim to be the true inheritors of this shared heritage. History reveals that numerous Prophets resided here, and the "doors of the sky" opened many times to bring revelation and guidance to humanity, establishing this territory as the "Land of Prophets" and the "Land of Blessings." Despite its profound importance, contemporary academia—particularly Orientalist studies—often focuses on its significance to Judaism and Christianity, while marginalizing the Muslim perspective regarding this sacred sanctuary. These studies frequently frame the current political dynamics of the Palestine/Israel conflict as a purely Palestinian national issue with negligible connection to Islamic religious sources, specifically the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). This study addresses this gap by articulating the Muslim viewpoint, presenting the city as an integral Islamic heritage. Furthermore, it demonstrates that Islamic Jerusalem historically served as a model of multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence under Muslim rule, reflecting a fundamental principle of Islamic teaching. Employing a qualitative methodology rooted in an Islamic conceptual framework, this paper analyzes the sanctity of the city through primary Islamic sources. The paper concludes that Islamic Jerusalem represents a pure Islamic heritage and occupies a spiritual position in the hearts of Muslims that transcends the boundaries of a nationalistic Palestinian issue. Moreover, it represents a unique historical model of religious tolerance capable of being revived. In terms of international contribution, this study offers a vital alternative framework for global peacebuilders and policymakers. By shifting the narrative from a purely nationalistic conflict to a holistic religious-historical perspective, it provides a historical precedent for multicultural management that can be utilized to foster interfaith harmony and sustainable peace in one of the world's most contested regions.



Introduction

The City of Islamic Jerusalem, also known as *Al-Quds* in Arabic, is a city in Palestine located in West Asia. The term "Islamic Jerusalem" for *Al-Quds* or the city of Jerusalem was first introduced by Aisha al-Ahlah in 1994 and defined by El-Awaisi, the founder of the new academic field of Islamic Jerusalem Studies. He defines this terminology as "a unique region laden with a rich historical background, religious significances, cultural attachments, competing for political and religious claims, international interests and various aspects that affect the rest of the World in both historical and contemporary context" (El-Awaisi, 2005, p. 8).

The usage of this term characterizes the sacred place as possessing a pure Islamic heritage beginning with the patriarch Adam (A.S.), contrary to the view that its Muslim heritage began with the Muslim conquest during the reign of Umar (R.A.), or that its Jewish heritage began at the time of Prophet Moses (A.S.). Several pieces of evidence from Islamic sources support this point, as it is the location of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is repeatedly mentioned by God in His last book, the Qur'an. The term "Mosque" was used for Al-Aqsa in the Holy Qur'an even before the conquest of Umar (R.A.) (Al-Qur'an, 17:1). Similarly, this place was considered sacred and holy even before the arrival of Moses (A.S.), as it was referred to as *Al-Arz al-Muqaddasa* (The Holy Land) when Prophet Moses asked the Children of Israel to enter it (Al-Qur'an, 5:21). These evidences from the Qur'an clearly demonstrate that the place was chosen by God as His sacred land even before the migration of Prophets towards it. This concept is further confirmed by the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.); the Prophet stated that the initial construction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque occurred forty years after the construction of the *Ka'aba* at the time of Adam (A.S.) (Muslim, p. 370).

Mapping the Boundaries of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Islamic Jerusalem

By mapping the boundaries of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Al-Ratrout (2013) demonstrated that the topology of the Al-Aqsa Mosque resembles that of the *Ka'aba* in Makkah. Both mosques are quadrilateral with few differences, suggesting that both were constructed by one person under the supervision of the One God. Furthermore, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is oriented towards the *Ka'aba*, which indicates that it was built after the *Ka'aba*. Some Muslim historians have suggested that Prophet Abraham, while completing the reconstruction of the *Ka'aba* with his elder son Isma'il, may have reconstructed the Al-Aqsa Mosque with his younger son Ishaq.

The geography, boundaries, and historical and Qur'anic explanations regarding the Al-Aqsa Mosque confirm that this holy place is neither exclusively Jewish, Christian, nor Muslim in origin, but was constructed at the time of Adam under God's supervision, rendering it a purely Islamic heritage.

History of Islamic Jerusalem

Regarding the history of Islamic Jerusalem, it is considered one of humanity's oldest homelands. Prophet Abraham (A.S.) and Prophet Lot (A.S.) migrated towards it, and subsequently, Prophet Moses (A.S.) asked the Children of Israel to enter it after escaping the tyranny of the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Children of Israel settled in this holy place, and multiple prophets were sent here in succession. Historical accounts suggest that the present structure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque was renovated by Prophet Jacob, and later by Prophet David. Its construction was subsequently



completed by Prophet Solomon (Al-Zarkashi, p. 30). This is also the land where Prophet Jesus (Isa) (A.S.) was born and raised in Bethlehem. Later, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) visited it during the Night Journey of Ascension (*Isra and Mi'raj*). This brief history reveals that this land is the land of Prophets; their footprints are preserved, and many are buried here, reinforcing its status as a pure Islamic heritage.

Islamic sources accord great importance to this land, describing it as the Land of *Barakah* (Blessing), the Land of Ascension, the Land of Holiness, the Land of *Jihad*, and the Land of the Last Hour. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly mentions it in both Makkan and Madinan surahs as a land of blessing and holiness. When narrating the story of Prophet Abraham, God mentions that He brought Abraham and Loot (A.S.) to the land of *Barakah* (Al-Qur'an, 21:71). Similarly, in the story of Moses (A.S.), God refers to it as the Land of Holiness. Roslan (2016) explains the concept of holiness, stating that semantically, the term *muqaddas* has two meanings: *Mutahhar*, meaning "purified," and *Mubarak*, meaning "blessed." Idiomatically, it refers to something that is always in a state of purification. Such is the land of Jerusalem throughout history; it has suffered distortion and alteration but is always purified through *Jihad*. It is noteworthy that the term *muqaddas* in the Holy Qur'an appears only in Madinan surahs, while the word *Mubarak* appears only in Makkan surahs, corresponding to the environments of the Makkan and Madinan periods. When Muslims needed stability and steadfastness in Makkah, God recounted the stories of Prophets who were sent to this blessed land and remained steadfast against tyranny. When Muslims gained political power in Madinah, the tone shifted, and God referred to the city of Islamic Jerusalem as *Muqaddas* to direct the attention of Muslims to this holy land as a land of *Jihad* and *Ribat*, indicating it will remain in a state of purification until the Last Hour.

In the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), one finds that through repeated commandments regarding the City of Islamic Jerusalem, the Prophet instilled the sanctity and holiness of this place in the minds of Muslims. He fostered an environment, particularly in Madinah, where Muslims were encouraged to take responsibility for preserving this Islamic heritage. He described it as a holy place, stating:

“Set out deliberately on a journey only to three mosques: this mosque of mine (in Madinah), the sacred mosque (in Makkah), and Al-Aqsa Mosque” (al-Bukhari, H 1864, p.166). He described it as a sacred place where prayer is worth five hundred times more than in any other mosque. He also praised those who reside there during times of turmoil. Abu Dawud quoted the Prophetic saying: “There will be migration after migration. The best of the inhabitants of the Earth will live in the place where Abraham migrated, and the evil inhabitants will remain elsewhere on Earth”

(Abu Dawud, H 2482, p.193)

In 621 A.D., the Prophet (S.A.W.) visited this holy land during the Night of Ascension and led the other Prophets in prayer, symbolizing that he had brought the previous Prophets' messages to their final form. Soon after migrating to Madinah, Muslims adopted the Al-Aqsa Mosque as their first *Qibla*, which further demonstrates the significance of this mosque for Muslims. During his Madinan period, he repeatedly assured Muslims that they would conquer Constantinople and the current Islamic Jerusalem, forecasting that this place would be the ultimate seat of the *Khilafah*,



where Muslims would gather from all parts of the world. Ibn Asaker quoted the Prophet (S.A.W.) as saying:

“This matter (namely the *Khilafah*) will be after me in Madinah, then in Syria, then in the Jazira, then in Iraq, then in Madinah, then in Jerusalem. If it is in Jerusalem, its home country is there, and if any people expel it, it will not return there forever”

(Ibn Asaker, 1927 p. 42)

In Islamic tradition, this is also the land where the dead will be raised and gathered. Given the vast number of traditions, Muslims possess a clear conceptual framework regarding Islamic Jerusalem as religiously significant. They have historically accepted the responsibility to preserve this Islamic heritage with zeal and determination. Hence, the claim that Jerusalem belongs solely to Palestinians or Arabs is incorrect; the City of Islamic Jerusalem belongs to all Muslims worldwide.

Islamic Jerusalem as a Land of Peaceful Co-Existence

Islam is humanity's oldest religion, beginning its journey with the advent of Adam (A.S.) on the earth. This divinely inspired religion offers a complete way of life, focusing on the monotheistic concept of God and the necessity of total submission to Him to attain peace. It is not confined to theistic philosophies but provides a practical code of life covering sociological, political, and moral aspects of humanity. It is noteworthy that the word "Islam" is derived from the Arabic word *Salama*, meaning "peace," indicating that the ultimate purpose of this divine religion is to attain peace and stability in the world. The beauty of Islam lies in its universality and its accommodation of other religions and ideologies under its rule.

This universality is confirmed by various verses of the Holy Qur'an. God says in His last Book: “O Mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (Al-Qur'an, 49:13). This verse unites all of humanity under a single bond, indicating that all nations are respectable and that their cooperation and co-existence create global peace and social security. It also rejects discrimination based on racial, religious, or national grounds.

Religious co-existence is defined as “a way for groups of different faith, ideology, and background to live together peacefully with mutual understanding and tolerance of each other” (Adesokan, 2015). As Islam is a strong proponent of peaceful co-existence in its religious and ideological aspects, its teachings assert that this can be best achieved under Islamic rule, where there is no discrimination among nations, as the One God is the God of all and His guidance is unbiased and universal. Muslim history serves as substantial evidence for this claim, showing that Muslim states were often more welcoming to other religions and nations compared to other religiously or ideologically based states.



The best example of this is the City of Islamic Jerusalem as a center of multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence for the three main religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When Umar (R.A.) first conquered the city, he assured other nations that their lives and property would be protected, their places of worship respected, and he strongly condemned forced conversions. The agreement of Umar with the people of Aelia is as follows:

“In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. This is what is granted security by the servant of Allah, Umar, the Commander of the faithful, to the people of Jerusalem. He grants to all, whether sick or sound, safety for their lives, their property, their churches, and their crosses, and for all that concerns their religion. Their churches shall not be changed into dwelling places, nor destroyed, neither shall they nor their appurtenances be in any way diminished, neither the crosses of the inhabitants nor aught of their possessions, nor shall any constraints be put upon them in the matter of their faith, nor shall any one of them be harmed”

(Peters, 1985, p. 258)

Conclusion

The paper concludes with the argument that Islam is a major promoter of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence, and Islamic Jerusalem in Muslim history stands as the best example of this. The paper further argues that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is not justified on purely nationalistic grounds; it is a fundamentally Islamic issue deeply rooted in the Muslim *Ummah*. Furthermore, the combined sanctity of this land for Muslims, Jews, and Christians can best be preserved under Islamic rule.

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AL-MAQĀSID

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MAQĀSID STUDIES & ADVANCED ISLAMIC RESEARCH

E-ISSN: 2735-1149, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2025, pp. 170-175

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