

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES OF AELIA (JERUSALEM) DURING THE BYZANTINE RULE (135 -638 A.D): ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

By
Othman Ismael Al-Tel*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to attempt to establish the topography and geographical boundaries of the Jerusalem. This spans the time when clear boundaries were set for this region by the Byzantine Emperor Hadrian in 135 A.D when he named it Aelia, until the arrival of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb in it on the eve of the first Islamic conquest of the Jerusalem. This study will be useful if we attempt to find some explanations for the reasons behind the contradictions in the Islamic sources regarding many issues related to the first Islamic conquest.

Keywords: Jerusalem, geographical boundaries, Byzantine rule, Aelia, Palestine

Introduction

From a historical point view Jerusalem was not a small city surrounded by walls, as one would first,¹ but was totally different from this assumption. It seems that Jerusalem, before the first Islamic conquest was considered a region and not just a mere city.

The issue of studying the geographical boundaries might seem to be of no great significance for someone who studies history, especially when the matter is related to the boundaries of a region, which have been defined for more a vary before these days. However, the matter is different with Jerusalem, especially when we study it during the early Islamic period; it is important, and indeed necessary, to know the boundaries of this region and its topography. This will provide answers to many questions related to the causes of inaccuracies and even contradiction in the Islamic sources on the first Islamic conquest. These issues include the siege of the region, and the military commanders who took part in conquering the region, in addition to the date of the conquest.

* Othman Ismael Al-Tel, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at College of Arts, History Department, Al-Quds University (Abu Dis), Palestine. His email addresses are oaltel@ arts.alquds.edu and othmanaltel@yahoo.com

¹More details about the boundaries of Al-Aqṣā Mosque area and the old city of Jerusalem at present time see Sāmī Karyīm al-Khaṣāwnī, *Qadiyat al-Quds fī litār al-Taswīyya al-Siyāsīyya lil-Sirā' al-'Arabī al-Israēlī 1948-1998*, Risālat Mājistaīr: University of Jordan, pp.3-4. Ra'if Najīm (1984), "Al-Ma'ālim al-Tārīkhiyya lil-Quds", *Majalat Shu'ūn 'Arabīa*, no, 4, pp.29-30. Mah mud Masāliha claims that the Muslims own only 2 Km in present-day Jerusalem which means he believed that this area is all the expanded boundaries of Islamic Jerusalem. Mahmud Masāliha (1997), "Al-Masjid al-Aqṣā al-Mubārak wa-Hayykal Banī Israel", in *Širā' al-'Adyān baīna al-Yahūdīa wal-Islām 'Alā Makān Haīkal Sulayymān*, p. 84.

The difficulty of studying the geographical boundaries of a region or a specific city in the early Islamic period is represented by the fact that the Islamic sources, especially the historical ones, pay scant attention to such issues. In addition, the early geographical sources did not take cognisance of the boundaries of the cities in general. The matter becomes increasingly difficult when we study the geographical boundaries of Palestine in general and Aelia in particular. This is because, with the emergence of Islam, new terms and concepts emerged such as the Blessed Land, the Holy Land and the Sacred Land. In order to distinguish between these concepts one would have to conduct specific and lengthy studies. This is primarily because the sources have inaccuracies many issues relating to these new concepts and to the boundaries of the Aelia region before the advent of Islam.

The researcher did not find anyone, especially among Muslim researchers, who paid attention to studying the geographical aspect of Aelia, either before the first Islamic conquest or after. However, there have been a few attempts by some orientalis, especially the Israelis, to study the history of Palestine before or after the Islamic conquest. Their aim was to delineate the boundaries of the region, in which the Byzantines prevented the Jews from residing after the war of Bār Kūhba (132 – 135 A.D). The majority of these studies have depended on the Bible as their main source. They contain many contradictions and inaccuracies, and they therefore are not necessarily to be taken as undisputed fact. When they are subjected to criticism and discussion, these contradictions become self-evident.

Early Islamic Historical Accounts

Before examining the geographical sources related to the topography and geographical boundaries of the Aelia region, it is important to point out that the Islamic sources especially the historical sources, for a very long time after the conquest, continued to use the Byzantine name for the region (Aelia). The name is sometimes followed by a semi-note, which indicates that this region is the region of Bayt al-Maqdis.² This gives us a very strong indication that the Muslims preserved this region as it was before the Islamic conquest. In other words, they did not introduce any major changes to the geographical boundaries of the region, which continued to be the same for a long time after the first Islamic conquest. The evidence for this is that the name the Muslims used to call the region, i.e. Bayt al-Maqdis, was only used individually in later eras. However, the Muslim historians did not pay any attention to distinguishing between the different eras of

² See for example: Muhammad Ibn Sa'd (1957), *Al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, Beirut: Dār Sādir wa Dār Beirut, Pp. 47, 251, 259., Vol. 3, p. 516. Ahmad Ibn Yahya Al-Balādhurī (1932), *Futūh al-Buldān*, Badwān Muhammad Badwān (ed), Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Misriyya bil-Azhar, p. 144. Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī (1986), *Kūāb Al-Futūh*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, pp. 222, 223. Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah Al-Azdi (1979), *Tārīkh Futūh al-Shām*, 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Āmir (ed), n.p: Mūassasat Sijil al-'Arab, p. 162. Ibn Al-Athīr.(1349 A.H), *Al-Kāmil Fī al-Tārīkh*, Dimashq: Idārat al-Tibā'a al-Muniriyya, Vol. 2, pp. 47 & 249. See also Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor (2008), "Islamicjerusalem Under Muslim Rule: A Study Of The Implementation Of Inclusive Vision On The Region," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 3, Issue 1.

the Byzantines and the Muslims and thus they fell into many inaccuracies and contradictions because of their use of different terminologies such as Aelia, Bayt al-Maqdis, al-Quds and others, as we shall see later.

Although neither early nor late Islamic historical sources gave credence to the issues of geography and boundaries, it is important to draw attention to an important account, which related to Aelia and its region. Both Abī ‘Ubayd (d. 224 A.H/ 839 A.D) in *Kitāb al-Amwāl* and al-Balādhurī (d. 279 A.H/ 892 A.D) in *Futūh al-Buldān* and the later source Ibn al-Murajjā (442 A.H/ 1050 A.D) in *Fadā’il Bayt al-Maqdis wa al-Khalīl wa Fadā’il al-Shām* give this account, with the same transmission chain on the authority of ‘Abdullah Ibn Ṣāliḥ (d. 223 A.H/ 838 A.H) on the authority of al-Layyṭh Ibn Sa’d (d. 165 A.H/ 782 A.D) on the authority of Yazīd Ibn Abī Ḥabīb (d.128 A.H/ 746 A.D). They mentioned that:

"Abī ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām said: ‘Abdullah Ibn Ṣāliḥ told him from al-Layyṭh Ibn Sa’d from Yazīd Ibn Abī Ḥabīb Khālīd Ibn-Thābit al-Fahmī was sent by ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb, who was at that time in al-Jābiya at the head of an army to Bayt al-Maqdis. After Khālīd fought its inhabitants, they agreed that the part surrounded by the walls should remain in their hands upon payment to the Muslims (*Jizya* tax), while the part outside the walls would be in the hands of the Muslims. Khālīd said to them, we have agreed to make peace with you on this, provided that the Commander of the Faithful (‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb) accepts it. He then wrote to ‘Umar and informed him about what had happened with him (*Mādhā Ṣana’a Allah Lahū*). ‘Umar wrote back to him: hold your position until I reach you. Khālīd stopped fighting them and ‘Umar came. When ‘Umar arrived, the inhabitants of Bayt al-Maqdis handed it over to him (‘Umar) on the basis of the peace treaty concluded with Khālīd Ibn-Thābit. Therefore, it is said that Bayt al-Maqdis was re-named ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb’s conquest".³

Al-Azdī (d. 430 A.H/ 1039 A.D) also cites evidence from which we can understand that the Aelia region, before the first Islamic conquest, extended over a vast area towards present day Jordan. In a message sent by ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ to Abū ‘Ubayda before the battle of al-Yarmūk, he informed him that a large number of the people of Aelia and many others among the people of Jordan had breached the peace treaty they had made with him when a new Byzantine force arrived in Syria, in addition to the Muslim withdrawals from many areas they had previously conquered.⁴ The fact that ‘Amr, when he had sent his message, had gathered the people of Jordan and some of Aelia people, warned them and asked them to

³ Abī ‘Ubayd (1303 A.H), *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, Muhammad Ḥamid al-Fiqqī (ed), Cairo:n.p, p. 153. Baladhurī. *Futūh*, Pp. 144-145. Ibn al-Murajjā (1995), *Fadā’il Bayt al-Maqdis wa al-Khalīl wa Fadā’il al-Shām*, Livnī (ed), Palestine: ‘Ūfir Shfā’āmir, p. 54. (In another account both of Abī ‘Ubayd and Ibn al-Murajjā reported that the ‘Umar sent a man from the Judāila tribe to Aelia), Abī ‘Ubayd, pp. 152-153. Ibn al-Murajjā, p. 52.

⁴ Al-Azdī, Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdullah (1979), *Tārīkh Futūh al-Shām*, ‘Abd al-Min‘im ‘Āmir (ed), Mūassasat Sijil al-‘Arab, p. 162.

accompany him to Aelia,⁵ greatly emphasis and verifies ‘Amr’s presence in the Jordan area at that time and shows that a section of the people of Aelia were close to him. In other words, these people are considered among the inhabitants of Aelia and the Aelia region used to cover or include these areas. Therefore, we can say that ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ, at that time and prior to it had concluded a peace treaty in which those inhabitants of Aelia who resided outside the walled part and further from it were considered to be inhabitants of its region.

This important text message sent by ‘Amr runs as follows:

The people of Aelia and many others among the people of Jordan, with whom we concluded peace covenants, have breached the covenant we made between us. They mentioned that the Byzantines have arrived in great armies and that you (the Muslims) withdrew from the land and left it for them. This has made them more daring and aggressive towards me and the Muslims under my command. They exchanged correspondence and made a deal to advance towards my stronghold.⁶

This message shows that ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ had conquered peacefully the part outside the walls of the Aelia region after the battle of al-Yarmūk (15 A.H/ 636 A.D). For several reasons, which will be discussed later, the researcher totally dismisses the fact that Khālīd Ibn Thābit was the conqueror of Jerusalem or that he was the person who concluded a peace treaty with its inhabitants. However, al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī accounts contain a very strong indication which supports my assumption that Aelia, on the eve of the Islamic conquest, was not merely the region that lay inside the walls, but rather a vast region which extended for longer distances outside these walls. In other words, the area outside the walls was considered an inseparable part of Aelia and the Muslims dealt with it on this basis.

Early Islamic Geographical Accounts

The information supplied by the early Islamic geographical sources about the Aelia region and its boundaries before the first Islamic conquest, is to some extent, general information. It sheds light on the sacred sites in the walled part, as well as giving some description of the topography of the region outside the walls. Ibn Khurdudhāba (205 – 280 A.H/ 820-893 A.D) in *al-Masālik wal-Mamālik*, al-Hamadhanī (d. 290 A.H/ 903 A.D) in *al-Buldān*, and al-Ya’qūbī (d. 292 A.H/ 905 A.D) in *al-Buldān* have mentioned the issue of the sacred sites.⁷

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 162-168.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁷See: Kāmīl Jamīl Al-‘Asalī (1992), *Bayt al-Maqdis fi Kutub al-Rahalāt ‘Ind al-‘Arab wa al-Muslimin*, ‘Ammān: Jordan, pp. 22-23. Le Strange Guy (1980), *Palestine Under The Muslims*, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 83-137, 138-172, 173-223. Amikham Elad (1995), *Medieval Jerusalem and Islam Worship*, New York: E.J Brill, pp. 4-6.

Although the information about the Aelia region and its boundaries, supplied by the early Islamic geographical sources is somewhat general, the successive sources give a description of and information about the Aelia region before the first Islamic conquest, detailing its topography and geographical boundaries. We notice this from Ibn Ḥaūqal (d. 376 A.H/ 986 A.D) in *Sūrat al-Ard*; al-Maḡdisī (d. 390 A.H/ 1000 A.D) in *Ahsan al-Taḡāsīm fī Ma‘rifat al-Aḡālīm*; Yāqūt al-Ḥamāwī (d. 626 A.H/ 1229 A.D) in *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*; al-Tīfāshī (d. 651 A.H/ 1253 A.D) in *Surūr al-Nafs bi Madārik al-Ḥawās al-Khams* who is quoted by many of the successive sources, such as al-Qalqashandī (d. 665 A.H/ 1257 A.D) in *Subḡ al-A’sha fī Šinā‘at al-Inshā’*, and Ibn Faḡlullāh Al-‘Amrī (d. 749 A.H/ 1348 A.D) in *Masālik al-Absār Fi Mamālik al-Amsār*, and others.⁸

Al-Maḡdisī (d. 390 A.H/ 1000 A.D) and al-Tīfāshī (d. 651 A.H/ 1229 A.D) are the only scholars who have mentioned specific estimates of the area of the Aelia region before the first Islamic conquest. They have estimated that this extended to 40 miles.⁹ At the same time, they presented a description, which seems to be more accurate than the description presented by other scholars about the topography of this region and its boundaries from the four directions. Al-Maḡdisī describes part of the city of Jerusalem and its region. He says that there was not among the towns of the provinces (meaning Syria or Bilād al-Shām) one bigger than Bayt al-Maḡdis, it was smaller than Makka and wider than al-Madīna. Furthermore, the Bayt al-Maḡdis area was a mountain, its hills covered with trees and within it there were three ponds: Birkat Banū Isra‘īl, Birkat Sulaymān and Bikat ‘Iyyād.¹⁰ According to him, this region was divided into four zones, the second zone where Bayt al-Maḡdis lay was mountainous country, wooded, with villages, springs, and cultivated fields. The main cities situated here were: Bayt Jibrīn, Bayt al-Maḡdis, Nāblus, al-Lajjuū, Kābūl, Qādis, al-Biqā‘, and Antākya (Antioch).¹¹

This description is mentioned by Yāqūt al-Ḥamāwī (d. 626 A.H/ 1229 A.H), who mentions a similar text,¹² and who also thinks that Hebron used to be part of the Aelia region.¹³ Furthermore, al-‘Amrī (d. 749 A.H/ 1348 A.D) thinks that Nāblus

⁸Ibn Ḥaūqal (n:d)(ed), *Mansūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Hayāh*, Beirut: n:p, Pp. 158-159. Al-Maḡdisī Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al-Maḡdisī (1994), *The Best Division for Knowledge Of The Regions: A Translation Of Ahsan al-Taḡāsīm Fi Ma‘rifat al-Aḡālīm*. Reviewed by Muḡammad Ḥamid Al-Tal, Garnet Published Limited: Jordan, Pp. 138-166, Pp.151-155, Pp.167-171. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1990), *Kitāb Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, al-Jindī & Farīd ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (ed), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Vol. 5, pp. 195-201. Al-Qalqashandī (1922), *Subḡ al-‘Ashā fī Šinā‘at al-Inshā’*, Vol. 4. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miḡriyya, pp. 100-103. See also Al-‘Amrī (1986), *Masālik al-Absār Fi Mamālik al-Amsār: Daūlat al-Mamālik al-Aūlā*, Durotya Krafuliski (ed), Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Islāmī Lil-Buhūth, p.123.

⁹Al-Maḡdisī, *The Best*, p. 157. Al-‘Amrī, p. 123.

¹⁰*Ibid*, pp.151-152.

¹¹*Ibid*, pp. 169-170.

¹²Yāqūt, Vol. 5, pp. 195-196.

¹³*Ibid*, Vol. 2, p. 245.

also lay on the same mountain as the Aelia region,¹⁴ which, before the first Islamic conquest, used to be called Aelia.¹⁵

Ibn Fadlullah al-‘Amrī (d. 749 A.H/ 1348 A.D) and al-Qalqashandī (d. 665 A.H/ 1267 A.D) distinguish between two regions in Palestine. The first region was after the advent of Islam, the sacred land (*al-Arḍ al-Mubāraka*). The second was before the first Islamic conquest of Aelia. Thus they avoided many inaccuracies which could have been caused by the use of such terminologies. Al-‘Amrī mentions that *al-Quds al-Sharīf* or *al-Arḍ al-Muqddasa* included the city of Jerusalem and the area around it up to the Jordan River which was called al-Sharī‘a and up to Palestine which was called al-Ramla. It also extended from the Syrian Sea (the Mediterranean Sea) to the cities of Lūṭīn breadth. Mountains and valleys covered most of this region except for its edges.¹⁶

This is the same text, which is cited by al-Qalqashandī when he deals with the Sacred Land.¹⁷ As for Islamic Jerusalem or Aelia as it was known before the first Islamic conquest, al-‘Amrī narrating from al-Tifāshī states:

*Al-Tifāshī said in his book Surūr al-Nafs bi Madārik al-Ḥwās al-Khams, that the narrators mentioned that this is the Land which Allah blessed, around forty miles in length by forty miles in breadth. Al-Bayt al-Muqadas (Al-Aqṣā mosque). Jerusalem lies in its centre. It used to be named Aelia in ancient times (before the first Islamic conquest). The saying of Almighty Allah, confirms that Bayt al-Maqdis lies at the centre or the middle of the Land that Allah blessed.*¹⁸

He further adds that Nāblus used to be part of this region and was included within its boundaries.¹⁹ Al-Maqdisī (d.390 A.H/ 1000 A.D) who was born in the region, lived there for many years and traveled widely as a geography scholar, is considered the first scholar to give an estimation of the distance through which the Islamic Jerusalem region (known as Aelia before the first Islamic conquest) extended.

At the same time, he gave a good and detailed description of this region. However, it appears that there is a contradiction between the estimate he gave for the extension of this region (40 miles) and the description and the geographical boundaries he mentioned for the same region. From his description it seems that this region extended much farther than 40 miles. He claims:

¹⁴Al-‘Amrī, p. 124.

¹⁵*Ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁶Al-‘Amrī, pp. 208-209.

¹⁷Qalqashandī, Vol. 4, pp. 104-105.

¹⁸Al-‘Amrī, p. 123.

¹⁹*Ibid*, p.124.

The limit (boundary) of the Holy City (Al-Quds i.e, Jerusalem) extends over the area around Jerusalem (Aelia) for forty miles, including the capital (Al-qasabah) and independent towns, twelve miles of the seashore, the towns of Sughar and Ma'āb, and five miles of desert (from the Bādīa i.e, semi-desert). To the south (to the qibla) it extends to beyond al-Kusayyfa and the land parallel to this. To the north it reaches the limits of Nābulus. This land is "blessed", as God-may he be exalted-has declared; the hills are covered with trees, the plains are cultivated, needing neither irrigation nor the watering of rivers. As the two men reported to Moses the son of 'Imrān: "We came on a land flowing with milk and honey."²⁰

From the analysis of this text, it becomes clear that there is inaccuracy in the distances he mentioned in his text regarding the extension of the Aelia region. For instance, the real distance from the centre of Islamic Jerusalem to the nearest spot on the edge of the sea (Dead Sea) was 18 miles and this distance reached 30 miles up to Mu'āb from the east. As for the west, we notice that al-Maqdisī does not mention anything at all, unless he covers this by saying, "*and five miles of the Bādīya (semi-desert)*".

Furthermore, as for the north the real distance from the centre of Islamic Jerusalem to the boundaries of Nāblus, (which was the 'Aqraba area) for which al-Maqdisī does not give an estimation of its distance, was 30 miles. To the al-Kusayyfa²¹ area and the area parallel to it from the south the distance exceeded 40 miles. This means that the region extended more than 70 miles from the north to the south (from 'Aqraba to al-Kusayyfa) and 35 miles from the east to the west (from Mu'āb to Gāzar and 'Imwās up to five miles from the Bādīya (semi-desert).

From this discussion it becomes clear to what extent there is a contradiction between the estimate mentioned by al-Maqdisī for the extension of this region and the description he mentioned about its geographical boundaries. Thus the researcher can draw up two different maps for this region. In the first map, the Aelia region (Islamic Jerusalem) extended forty miles in length by forty miles in breadth where its extension from the centre of Islamic Jerusalem would have been as follows:

To the east, it extended to the edge of the seashore (18 miles).²² This means that the region extended 22 miles to the west, i.e. up to the boundaries of Gāzar and 'Imwās. To the north it extended up to the

²⁰Al-Maqdisī. *The Best*, p. 157. It can be noticed that the translator did not use either the name Aelia which is mentioned in the Arabic text or the word *qibla*. Therefore, the researcher put them between brackets to confirm that they do exist in the Arabic text mentioned by Al-Maqdisī.

²¹Al-Kusayyfa still keeps its name until the present day, it is a town that lies at the start of the northern Negev desert in present Palestine. See Shukrī 'Arāf, (n.d), *Jundā al-Urdun wa Filastīn fi al-Adab al-Juhrāfī al-Islāmī* (Matba'at al-Sharq al-'Arabia, Jerusalem, p. 188.

²²The researcher use the Roman mile which the same that used by Al-Maqdisī.

*district of Guphna (short of the limits of Nāblus). To the south it extended to the northern boundaries of Hebron, i.e. the areas of Halhūl and Sa'īr.*²³

In the second map, the extent of Aelia region (Islamic Jerusalem) would have been as follows:

*To the east it extended to Mu'āb (30 miles). This means that it included parts of the sea and five miles to the west. To the north it extended to the boundaries of Nāblus, i.e. the area of 'Aqraba (30 miles). To the south it extended to beyond al-Kusayyfa and the land parallel to it (40 miles).*²⁴

When we take into account the description mentioned by different sources which are in agreement that the topography of the Aelia region (Islamic Jerusalem) was a mountainous one,²⁵ as well as Yāqūt's assumption that Hebron and Nāblus were parts of it, we will have then a new and different map. In this map the Aelia region (Islamic Jerusalem) extends as follows:

*It extended from Mu'āb in the east to Ludda, Bayt Jibrīn and 'Imwās in the west. It extended from the northern boundaries of Nāblus, i, e the area of Ṣartaba in the north to al-Kusayyfa and the area parallel to it in the south.*²⁶

The researcher argues, despite the great difficulty of identifying accurate boundaries for the extension of the Aelia region before the first Islamic conquest, we can say that descriptions cited by the sources contain a significant accuracy.

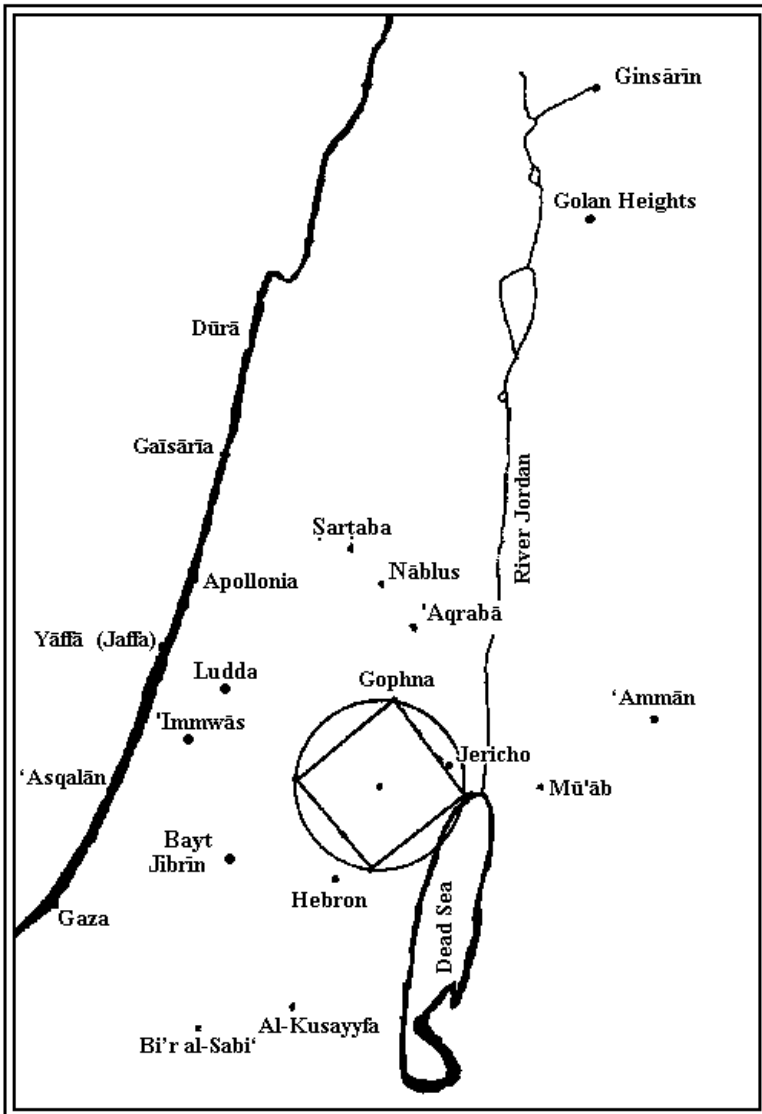
²³See the map, p 53.

²⁴See the map, p.54.

²⁵See Al-Maqdisī. *The Best*, pp. 151-157. Ibn Haūqal (n.d), *Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard*, Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Hayāh, pp. 158-159. Al-'Amrī, Pp. 208-209. Yāqūt, Vol. 5, p.193-201. Qalqashandī, Vol. 4, pp. 101-103. Ibn Shaddād (1962), *Al-A'lāq al-Khatīrā fi Umarā' al-Shām wa al-Jazīyya: Tārīkh Lubnān, Sūriyya wa Filstīn*, al-Dahān (ed), Jordan: Dār Sādir & Dār Beirut, p. 198. Al-Qizwīnī (n.d) *Athār al-Bilād wa Akhbār al-'Ibād*, Jordan: Dār Sādir wa Dār Beirut, p. 77.

²⁶See the map, p. 56.

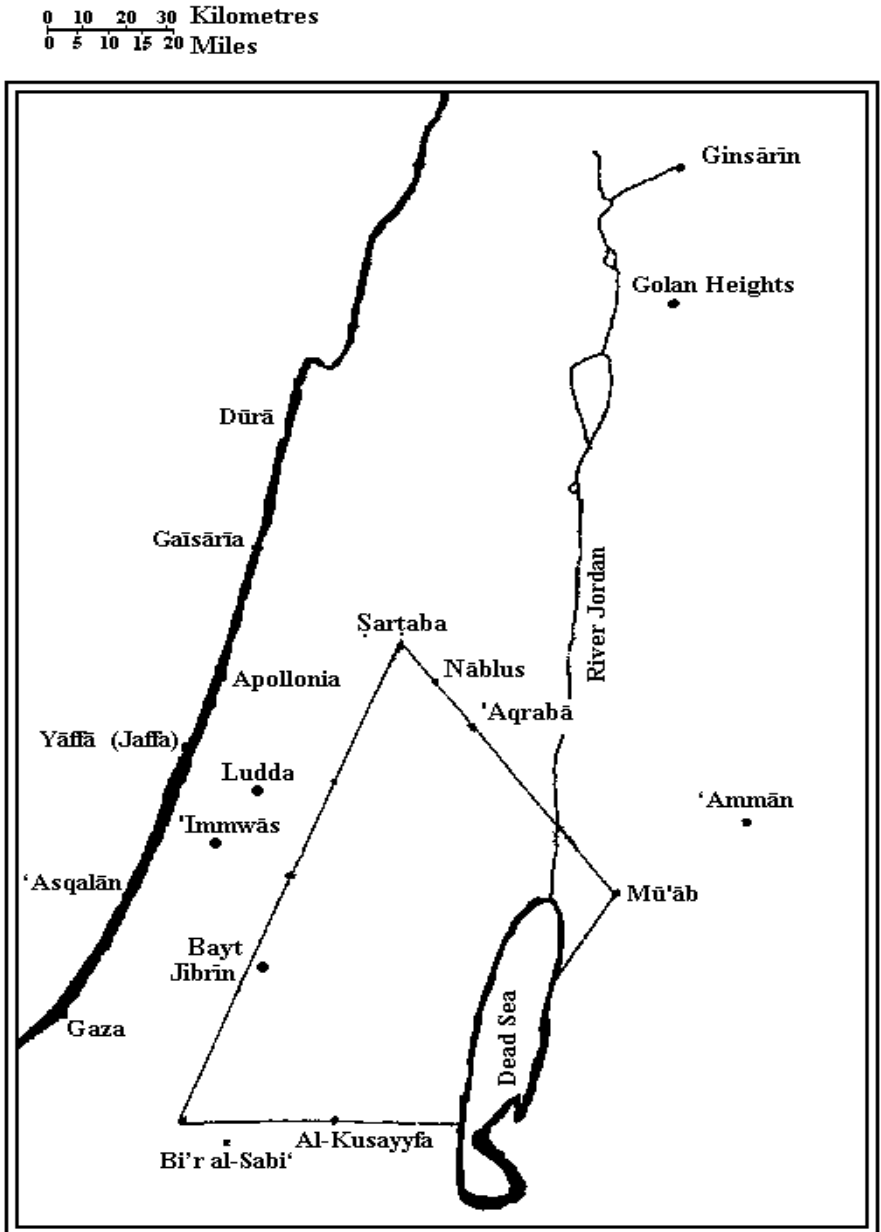
0 10 20 30 Kilometres
0 5 10 15 20 Miles



Map (1)

This map has been drawn up on the basis of the estimation of al-Maḡdisī (The Best Division for Knowledge of the Regions)). A Translation of (*Aḡsan al-Taḡāsīm fī Ma'rīfat al-Aḡālīm*), translated by Basil Anthony Collins, reviewed by

Muhammad Hāmid al-Tal (Center for Muslim Conurbation to Civilization, 1994), p. 157.



Map (2)

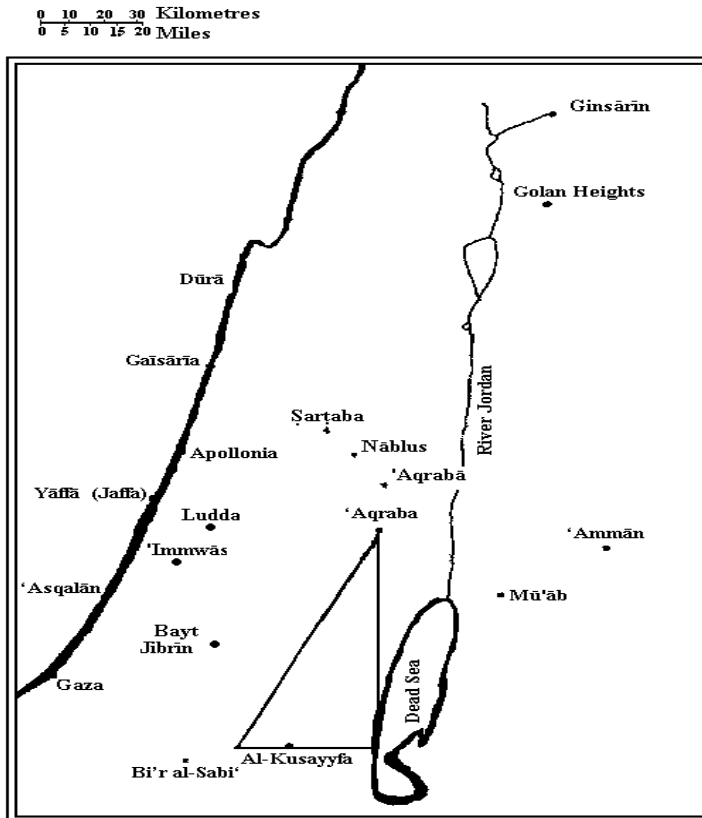
This map has been drawn up on the basis of the description of geographical sources of the Aelia (Jerusalem) region's extended boundaries before the first Islamic conquest. Among these sources are: Al-Maḡdisī, Ibn Ḥāūqal, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, Ibn FaḍLullāh Al-‘Amrī, al-Qalqashandī and others.

Geographically, it is well known that the area which extended from Nāblus to al-Kusayyfa in addition to the area of Ludda, Gāzar, ‘Imwās, Bayt Jibrīn and the other areas west of Jerusalem, except for the eastern side which was a low area, all have the same topography that lies on the same mountain range. This range starts from Mu‘āb and al-Karak and continues in the direction of Nāblus, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron. From the south of Hebron, it starts to gradually decline until it totally disappears in al-Negve desert close to Bi‘r al-Sabi‘.²⁷ In other words, these mountains disappear in al-Kusayyfa area and the area parallel to it. This is the same area, which is cited by al-Maḡdisī as the boundaries of the Islamic Jerusalem region from the south. He also called it *al-Jabal* (mountain) region and mentioned the names of other areas, which lay within.

From ‘Amr’s message to Abū ‘Ubyda we understand that the peace treaties up to that time were concluded with an element of the people of Aelia and a section of the people of Jordan and not with all of them. In other words, they were concluded with the people of Aelia who resided in the area close to the area where ‘Amr was. Even Ibn ‘Asakir (d. 539 A.H/ 1144 A.D) when he talked about the place where ‘Ubāda Ibn al-Samit (d 34 A.H/ 645 A.D),²⁸ died he mentioned that ‘Ubāda died in al-Ramla at Bayt al-Maḡdis. This means that he made al-Ramla part of Bayt al-Maḡdis (Islamic Jerusalem).

²⁷See Taysīr Jibāra (1986), *Dirasāt fī Tārīkh Filastin al-Ḥadīth*, al-Quds: Mu‘assasat al-Ba‘ādir al-Sahāfiyya, p.4.

²⁸See Al-‘Uṣfurī, Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt (1966), *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt : Riwāyat Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Al-Azdī*, Suhāil Zakkār (ed), Dimashq: Matābi‘ Wazārat al-Thaqāfa wa al-Irshād al-Qawmī, Vol. 1, p. 220. Vol. 2, p.776. Al-‘Uṣfurī, Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt (1960), *Tārīkh Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt : Riwāyat Baqī Ibn Mikhlād*, Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattah ‘Ashūr (ed), Dimashq: Matābi‘ Wazārat al-Thaqāfa wa al-Irshād al-Qawmī, Vol. 1, p. 180. Ibn Sa‘d, Vol. 3, p. 546, 621. Ibn Qutayba (1969), *Kitāb al-Ma‘ārif*, Tharwat ‘Ukāsha (ed), Cairo : Dar al-Ma‘ārif, p. 255. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (1995), *Al-Isāba fī Ma‘rifat al-Sahāba*, ‘Adil Ahmad ‘Abd al-Jauad & Muhammad Mu‘awwad (ed), introduce by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Min‘im al-Bari, ‘Abd al-Fattah Abū Sitta and Jum‘a Tahir al-Najjar, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Vol. 3, pp. 505-507. Ibn Al-Athīr (1970), *Uṣd al-Ghāba fī Mar‘ifat al-Sahāba*, Muhammad Ibrahim al-Banna & Muhammad Ahmad ‘Ashūr and Mahmud ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Fāyīd (ed), Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Vol. 3, pp.160-161.



Map (3)

This map has been drawn up on the basis of the description of al-Maqdisi (The best Division for Knowledge of the Regions). A Translation of (A h. san al-Taqaṣīm fī Maʿrifat al-Aqālīm), translated by Basil Anthony Collins, reviewed by Muhammad Ḥāmid al-Tal (Center for Muslim Conurbation to Civilization, 1994), p. 157.

Since the region of Islamic Jerusalem was a vast area which extended to Muʿab, Bayt Jibrin and ʿImwās and included Nāblus in the north and al-Kusayyfa in the south, why did al-Maqdisi (d.390 A.H/ 1000 A.D) and al-Tifāshī (d. 651 A.H/ 1253 A.D) after him estimated that the extension of this region was forty miles and then describe a region whose boundaries extended much farther that?

In order to answer this question and explain the reason behind these inaccuracies, the researcher noticed that the Muslim geographic scholars did not use the mile as a unit for measuring distances except in very rare situations. In general, they used other terms in their estimations such as *al-Farsakh*, *al-Barīd*, *al-Yaūm* (a day's

journey); and *al-Marḥala* (a stage) as the Arab geographic historian, Nicola Ziyāda, indicated.²⁹

In fact, we do not exactly know the terms which al-Tīfāshī used for estimating distances because his book did not reach us. However, when we examine al-Maqdisī's writing we notice that he used the concepts and terms *al-Barīd*, *al-Yaūm*, *al-Marḥala* and *al-Farsakh*. He did not use the mile except in a few cases but not in his comments about Syria. This means that there is a strong indication that al-Maqdisī quotes this estimation from an earlier source without mentioning that source and without knowing exactly the length of the mile. However, the description he gives for the region would appear to be far more accurate than his estimation for the extension of the boundaries of the Islamic Jerusalem region. Al-Tīfāshī then quoted this estimate from al-Maqdisī or from someone else without mentioning the source he quoted from. However al-‘Amrī (d. 749 A.H/ 1348 A.D) clearly indicated that he was quoting al-Tīfāshī (d. 651 A.H/ 1253 A.D).

In addition, the Muslim geographic scholars displayed a significant degree of accuracy when they used their own terms and concepts for measuring or estimating distances. Using the mile, however, caused them to make some errors. In fact, the concepts of *al-Barīd*, *al-Yaūm*, *al-Marḥala*, *al-Farsakh* and others greatly suited the Arab nature of travelling from one place to another and the estimation of the time that they took to cover these distances. For instance, al-Maqdisī estimates the distance from al-Ramla to Jerusalem, Bait Jibril, ‘Asqalān in every case as *Marḥala* (one stage) and from Jerusalem to Bait Jibril, Masjid Ibrahim (mosque of Abraham in Hebron), Arīhā (Jericho); in every case as *Marḥala* (one stage).³⁰

Furthermore, similar estimates were reported by Ibn Ḥaūqal (d. 376 A.H/ 986 A.D). He calculated the distance from al-Ramla to Jerusalem *Yaūm* (a day's journey), from Jerusalem to Masjid Ibrahim (Hebron), either *al-Yaūm* (a day's journey), from Jerusalem to Arīhā (Jericho) *Marḥala* (a stage), and from Jerusalem to al-Balqā' *Marḥalataīn* (two stages).³¹ In fact, the distances from Jerusalem to these areas were very similar. They were close to each other, especially when we take into account the nature of the old roads, which linked them. This agrees with the geographical estimation mentioned above.

²⁹Nicola Ziyāda (1974), *Jughrafiyyat al-Shām 'Inda Jughrafiyyū al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijrī*, al-Mutamarr al-Dawlī Li Tārīkh Bilād al-shām, *Tārīkh Bilād al-Shām Min al-Qarn al-Rābi' li al-Qarn al-Sābi' 'Ashar*, ‘Ammān : Jordan University, Muḥammād ‘Adnan al-Bakhīt, *et.al* (ed), Beirut: Al-Dār al-Mutaḥidah Lil-Nashir, pp. 151-152.

³⁰Al-Maqdisī. *The Best*, p. 175.

³¹Ibn Ḥaūqal, *op.cit.*, pp. 170-171.

When the Byzantine Emperor Hadrian destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple in 135 A.D, he ordered the Jews to be excluded from residing in Jerusalem and gave it a new name (Aelia).³² Part of this decree reads:

*It is forbidden to all the circumcised persons to enter or stay within the territory of Aelia. Any contravening of this prohibition shall be put to death.*³³

It seems that the area that they were prohibited from entering was also clearly defined. However, it can be argued from Hadrian's decree that the area in which the Jews were prohibited from residing was not merely a city, but rather a large territory. This point can be understood by the fact that when Abu Baker sent the Muslims to conquer Syria, he sent 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ to two regions which were Palestine and Aelia with the words of Abū Bakr "You are assigned the task of conquering Palestine and Aelia " *'Alaṭka bi Filastīn wa Ilyā'* " *عليك بفلسطين وإيلياء* ".³⁴

Modern Scholars Arguments

Avi Yonah and J. Wilkinson argue that the prohibition area included the districts of Guphna, Herodium and an area west of Jerusalem called Orine or "Hill country".³⁵ Furthermore, Yonah states that this was the area which witnessed the fighting during the war of Bār Kūhba (132-135 A.D), when the war took place in Judaea, the 'King Mountain,' (Har-ha-Me-lekh; in Greek Orine), the area between Bethel in the north of Jerusalem, Kfar Lekita'a and 'Imwās on the Bayt Jibrīn-Hebron road south of Jerusalem.³⁶ Hadrian, therefore, prevented the Jews from residing in the area, which extended to Judaea, Orine, Herodium and 'Agraba. It must be noticed these areas extended far beyond the area which witnessed the fighting during the war of Bār Kūhba.

A modern study has been prepared by fifty scholars of history and archaeology from a dozen different countries, from Palestine to the Near East. This study reveals that the Aelia area which was defined by the Byzantines in 135 A.D included or extended to the Dead Sea in the east and to Bethlehem and 'Imwās in

³² See F.E. Peters (1995), *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginning of Modern Times*, New Jersey: Princeton University press, pp. 124-130.

³³ See Avi Yonah (1976), *The Jews of Palestine. A Political History from the Bar Kohba War to the Arab Conquest*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 19. John Wilkinson (1992), "Jerusalem under the Rome and Byzantium: 63B.C-637 A.D", in *Kāmīl Jamīl al-'Asalī* (ed), p. 88. Zūfīr Islām Khān (1992) (ed), *Tārīkh Filastīn al-Qadīm 1220 B.C-1395 AD: Mundhū Awwal Khazū Yahūdī Hattā Aakhir Khazū Sāiīī*, Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, pp. 90-93.

³⁴ Al-Wāqīdī (n.d)(ed), *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām wa bihamishi Tuhfat al-Nazrīn fī man Hakama Misr min al-Wūlā wal-Salatīn li 'Abdīllah al-Sharqāwī*, Vol. 1&2, Vol, 1&2. S. 1, Cairo: Maktabat wa Matb'at al-Mashhad al-Husayyīnī, p. 8.

³⁵ Yonah, p. 17. J. Wilkinson. *Jerusalem Under*, p. 88.

³⁶ Yonah, p. 19.

the west. To the north it extended to the limits of Guphna and Sartaba, which was considered part of Nāblus. To the south, this area touched the edge of the Dead Sea and continued in a zigzag manner to the Geliah area between Herdium and al-Dārūm.³⁷ It is interesting to note from the geographical boundaries mentioned in these studies that the Aelia region after 135 A.D was approximately the same region which al-Maḡdisī estimated as being forty miles by forty miles.

The issue of these boundaries is related to Yonah's claim that the whole population of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan River at that time has been estimated as about two and a half million and the Jews among these as 1,300,000. However this number declined to between 700,000 and 800,000 after the war of Bār Kūhba. Among those, between 300,000 and 400,000 were concentrated in Galīlee.³⁸ After the war and Hadrian's decree in 135 A.D, the Jews remained living in three main areas, the Jordan valley near the Dead Sea; al- Dārūm; Ludda and Sharon and Bath. However, most of them resided in the Hipaus and Susitha, east of the Sea of Galīlee.³⁹

The researcher argues that there is a significant contradiction between the number of Jews mentioned by Yonah and between the extended boundaries of the area that the Jews were prevented from residing in after 135 A.D as reported by Yonah, Wilkinson, and the Atlas of the Bible. If that number were approximately 1,500,000 before the war of Bār Kūhba, then it is natural to assume that most of these Jews were living in the same region in which they were prevented from residing after the war. When we add this number to the other people, who lived in the same region such as the Arabs, Byzantines, Greeks and others, the Jews were 3/5-4/5 of the whole population living in an area which covered 40 miles by 40 miles. According to this, only 1/5-2/5 of the population was living in the remaining region of Palestine and Jordan, an area exceeding 70,000 square miles.

Thus it becomes very difficult to accept the number estimated by Yonah. Consequently, the researcher can say that either there is an exaggeration in the number of Jews in Palestine as estimated by Yonah or that the area of the region in which they were prevented from residing after 135 A.D was far greater than the area of the region which he mentioned. In other words, the area of this region had to be large enough to accommodate both the large number of Jews and other sectors of the population. Therefore, it is more likely to assume that the traditional conflict between the Byzantines and the Jews in the Jerusalem region until Hadrian's era prompted Hadrian to expand the area in which the Jews were

³⁷ James B. Pritchard (1987) (ed), *The Times Atlas of Bible*, London: Times books, p. 157.

³⁸ Yonah, pp. 19, 241. In contrast, J. Wilkinson argues that "the population cannot in fact be counted, since we do not know the total. Let us guess that it was about two million, as it about in Palestine of 1947. In fact there are two easy (and to that unreliable) ways to judge the religious in a list published in 337 AD. The second is to count the number of religious buildings of the Roman and Byzantine periods which have been excavated". Wilkinson. *Jerusalem Under*, p. 96.

³⁹ Yonah, p. 16, 240.

prevented from residing. It is understood that this area included a vast region, which extended for a long distance from the centre of Jerusalem.

The researcher argues that the bloody conflicts which the Aelia region witnessed between the Jews and the Byzantines until the time of Emperor Hadrian prompted him to expand the zone of the area the Jews were prevented from entering and residing in.

The Atlas of the Bible mentioned King David's kingdom (1000-961 B.C). This is the Israeli kingdom, which the Jews attempted to renew after their return from enslavement in Iraq, in 539 B.C. The area of that kingdom did not exceed more than the area of al-'Aisawiyya, al-'Ayzariyya, Abū Dīs and Ralib in the east to Bayt 'Ūr al-Fūqā, Bayt Sūrīk and 'Aīn Kārim in the west. To the north that area extended to Guphna, 'Aīn Yabrūd, Daīr 'Ijūr Herodiom and Daīr al-Banāt in the south.⁴⁰

As can be seen, this is too smaller than the area that the Jews were prevented from entering and residing in in 135 A.D., which enhances the researcher's belief that Emperor Hadrian had expanded and added new territories to the Aelia region. Furthermore, the same bloody events seem to have reduced the number of Jews to a very great extent after 135 A.D. This is confirmed by thorough investigation of the Islamic sources relating to the first Islamic conquest of the region. For instance, in many peace covenants which were concluded between the Muslims and the local population, there was nothing to indicate that there were any peace treaties being concluded with the Jews in Palestine. This was contrary to those being concluded with other sects such as the Sammrīts, al-Jarjūma and the Christians of Banū Taghlib, who were treated as an independent sect.⁴¹ Al-Balādhurī related, on the authority of Abī Hafṣ al-Dimashqī, that the Jews were under the control of the Christians; therefore they entered with them in the peace treaty.⁴² This indicates that they were a very small minority, totally submissive to the local administration in the regions in which they resided. This situation has prompted H. J. Wils in his book, *Mūjaz al-Tārīkh* to say that:

*The life of Jews (in Palestine) resembles the life of a man who insists on living in the middle of a busy street where the minibuses and trucks continuously run him over. From the start to finish their (kingdom) was not more than a transient event in the history of Egypt, Syria, Assyria and Phoenicia. That history was greater and more majestic than their history.*⁴³

⁴⁰*The Times Atlas of Bible*, p. 73.

⁴¹See Balādhurī. *Futūh*, pp. 162-163, Pp.163-167, Pp. 185-187.

⁴²*Ibid*, p. 13.

⁴³H. J. Wils. *Mūjaz al-Tārīkh*, cited in Zifir al-Islām, p. 97.

The Jews joined the Persian who entered Palestine in 614 A.D. and destroyed most of the churches of Aelia.⁴⁴ Therefore, Emperor Hercules renewed Hadrian's decree and issued a decree in which he allowed the killing of the Jews wherever they were.⁴⁵ Yonah claims that after 135 A.D. the Jews continued to reside in Jericho and al-Dārūm, which were the only two areas that lay within the domain of Aelia region. However, Yonah did not produce any strong evidence that goes back to original sources in order to support his claim about their existence here. If this existence turned out to be true, that does not necessarily mean that these two areas were outside the Aelia region where the Jews were prevented from residing in 135 A.D. It seems that the Byzantines were lenient at some historical stages after Hadrian and therefore they did not strictly apply his decree. Wilkinson argues that:

*Constantine's policy was the same as Hadrian's towards the Jews. They were not allowed to live in Jerusalem, but they made pilgrimage to the Western Wall of the Temple, and once a year on the Ninth of Abs' they were allowed into the Temple site to lament its destruction.*⁴⁶

Zifir al-Islām Khān argued that Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who ruled 200 years after Hadrian, allowed the Jews to enter Jerusalem for prayers.⁴⁷ Wilkinson argues that the Byzantines felt that the Jews no longer represented any kind of danger due to the paucity of their numbers and their total submission to the Byzantine authority.

Conclusion

In short, one can say that establishing the accurate geographical boundaries of the Aelia region before the first Islamic conquest is an extremely difficult task. However, it is clear that this region, which was re-named by the Byzantine Emperor Hadrian in 135 A.D., as Aelia, was in fact a region at that time. Therefore it is appropriate to call it a region rather than a city. This was the region, which the Islamic sources described, in clear and accurate terms. However, there are inaccuracies in the sources: al-Maqdisī and al-Tīfāshī who followed him, in particular, estimated the extension of this region to be forty miles and, like other sources gave a description of a region which was far longer.

The reason for this inaccuracies can be attributed to the fact that al-Maqdisī did not use the mile as a unit for measuring distances. It is thus more likely that he quoted a previous source without examining it. Hence he fell into error and

⁴⁴See Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Jerusalem under the Rome and Byzantium*, p. 102. Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine*, p. 266. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, 1992). *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, part one, Oxford University Press, pp. 3-5. Kaegi, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

⁴⁵See Zifir al-Islām Khān, *op.cit.*, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁶Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Under Rome and Byzantium*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷Zifir al-Islām Khān, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

inaccuracies, which also applies to al-Tīfāshī. This is clear from the accuracy displayed by Arabic geographic scholars who used their own terms and units when measuring terms of distance, such as *al-Farsakh*, *al-Barīd*, *al-Yaūm* (a day's journey) and *al-Marḥala* (a stage).

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