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## The Great Mosque and Its Ka'ba as an Islamic Temple Complex in Light of Lundquist's Typology of Ancient Near Eastern Temples

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CHAPTER 10

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THE GREAT MOSQUE AND ITS KA‘BA AS  
AN ISLAMIC TEMPLE COMPLEX  
IN LIGHT OF LUNDQUIST’S TYPOLOGY OF  
ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLES

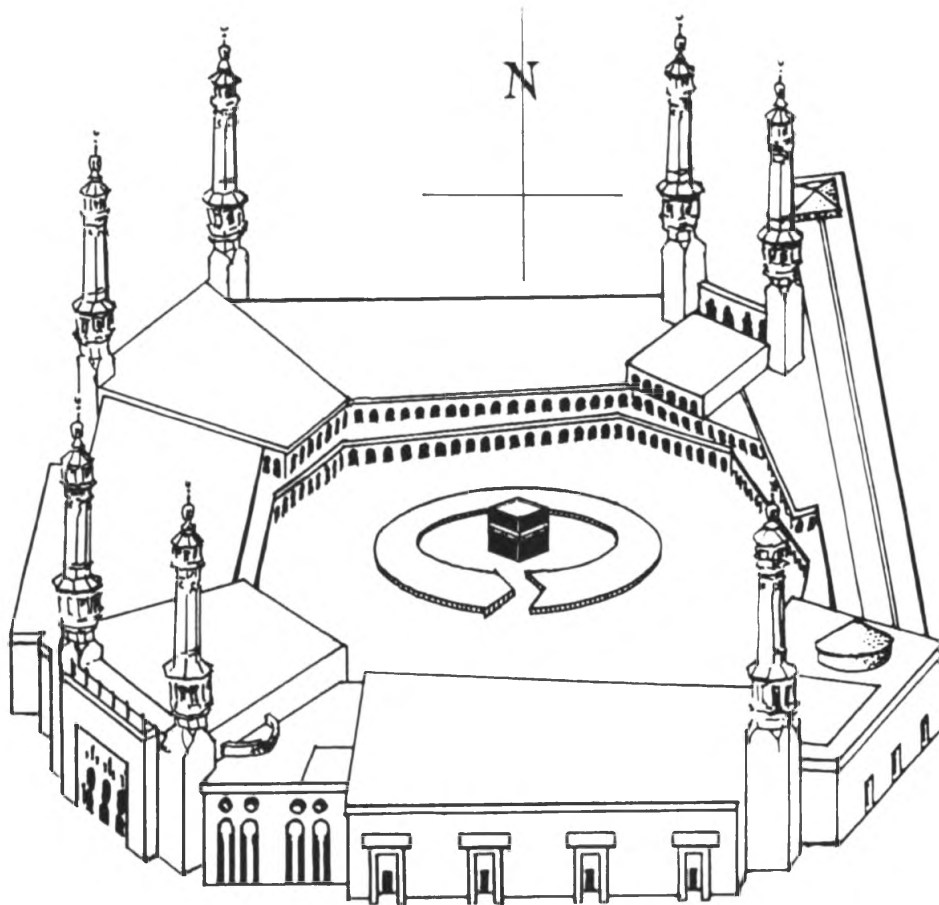
*Gaye Strathearn and Brian M. Hauglid*

Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, such as Sumeria, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and Israel, were diverse cultural entities that have each made a unique contribution to the development of Western civilization. Yet along with their diversity and uniqueness, we find significant points of cultural contact and overlap. One such element is the importance each placed on its temple complexes. These complexes provided both religious and social structure for the surrounding communities. Although each temple complex incorporated singular features, John Lundquist has listed nineteen features shared by temples throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>1</sup> Lundquist’s typology highlights “extraordinary cultural, historical and religious continuity” in areas that are otherwise plagued by “extraordinary cultural disruptions.”<sup>2</sup> This methodology has its limitations, especially when we consider that the typology represents an academic construction rather than any single reality. Even if one acknowledges the limitations, such a typology has considerable value, especially given the comparatively few archaeological and textual remains of temples from the

ancient world. The typology provides a standard by which we can evaluate the available material. Using it as a measuring stick, we can then see parallels between ancient Near Eastern temple complexes and other institutions that might otherwise have been overlooked.

One such possible parallel occurs with the Great Mosque of Mecca and its Ka'ba, although the same comparisons cannot be drawn for all Islamic mosques. The Ka'ba, as we shall see, sets the Great Mosque apart from other mosques. Even in pre-Islamic times the Ka'ba was a sacred site and was considered to be "the sacred House of Allāh."<sup>3</sup> With the rise of Islam, the Ka'ba continued to make its surrounding area sacred, especially since Muhammad cleansed it of what he considered pagan idols (with the exception of the images of Jesus and Mary). Since that time the Ka'ba has played a central role in the religious life of Muslims around the world. As such, scholars have compared its functional similarities to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> In at least one tradition Solomon compares his temple to the Ka'ba when he prays, "My God and Master, thou hast clad me with the garments of prophethood and hast given me great dominion. I ask thee to give me in building thy holy house what thou gavest Abraham thy friend in building the Kaaba."<sup>5</sup>

Heribert Busse believes that three main similarities exist between the Jewish temple and the Ka'ba. First, the temple and the Ka'ba have a common foundation in Semitic religion. Second, after the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, two successors arose: the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Muslim Ḥaram al-Sharīf (which occupies the site previously occupied by the temple). Busse further argues that "Jewish traditions concerning the Temple were transferred to the Ḥaram al-



*Figure 9. Every year during the month of pilgrimage to the Great Mosque of Mecca, tens of millions of devout Muslims circumambulate the Ka'ba counterclockwise in a ritual that emphasizes its central importance to their faith.*

Sharīf: part of them came directly from the Temple, part of them via the Church of the Holy Sepulchre."<sup>6</sup> Third, a transfer of traditions occurred "from the Temple to the [Ka'ba] via [the] Ḥaram al-Sharīf (or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) in order to make the [Ka'ba] a sanctuary equal to the Temple or even superior to it."<sup>7</sup> In his article Busse concentrates on his second and third points, but we will, through Lundquist's typology, focus more on Busse's first point: that the temple and the Ka'ba have a common

Semitic origin. We will first give a brief overview and description of the Great Mosque and its Ka'ba and will then show, on a point-by-point basis, how those structures parallel typologically the temple complexes of the ancient Near East.

## The Great Mosque and Its Ka'ba

The Great Mosque stands today as the holy center of Islam (see fig. 9). Ever since the prophet Muhammad delivered God's command, "From whatsoever place thou isuest, turn thy face towards the Holy Mosque" (sura 2:144),<sup>8</sup> untold millions from all continents have prostrated themselves five times a day toward this magnetic center. The Mosque is also known as *Bait Allah* (House of God),<sup>9</sup> which is synonymous in the ancient Near East with the word *temple*.

The central edifice of the Great Mosque is the Ka'ba (see fig. 10). The word *ka'ba* is Arabic for "any square [or cubic] house, or chamber, or the like,"<sup>10</sup> and thus the Ka'ba derives its name from the appearance of the building. A. J. Wensinck described it as being

built of layers of the grey stone produced by the hills surrounding Mecca. It stands on a marble base 10 inches high. . . . The four walls of the Ka'ba are covered with a black curtain (*kiswa*) which reaches to the ground and is fastened there with copper rings. . . . At two-thirds of its height a gold embroidered band (*hizām*) runs round, which is covered with verses from the Qur'an in fine calligraphy.<sup>11</sup>

Zahra Freeth and H. Winstone refer to the Ka'ba as "Islam's holy of holies."<sup>12</sup> Of central importance to the Ka'ba is the Black Stone (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*) embedded in the eastern corner; this the pilgrims touch as they participate in

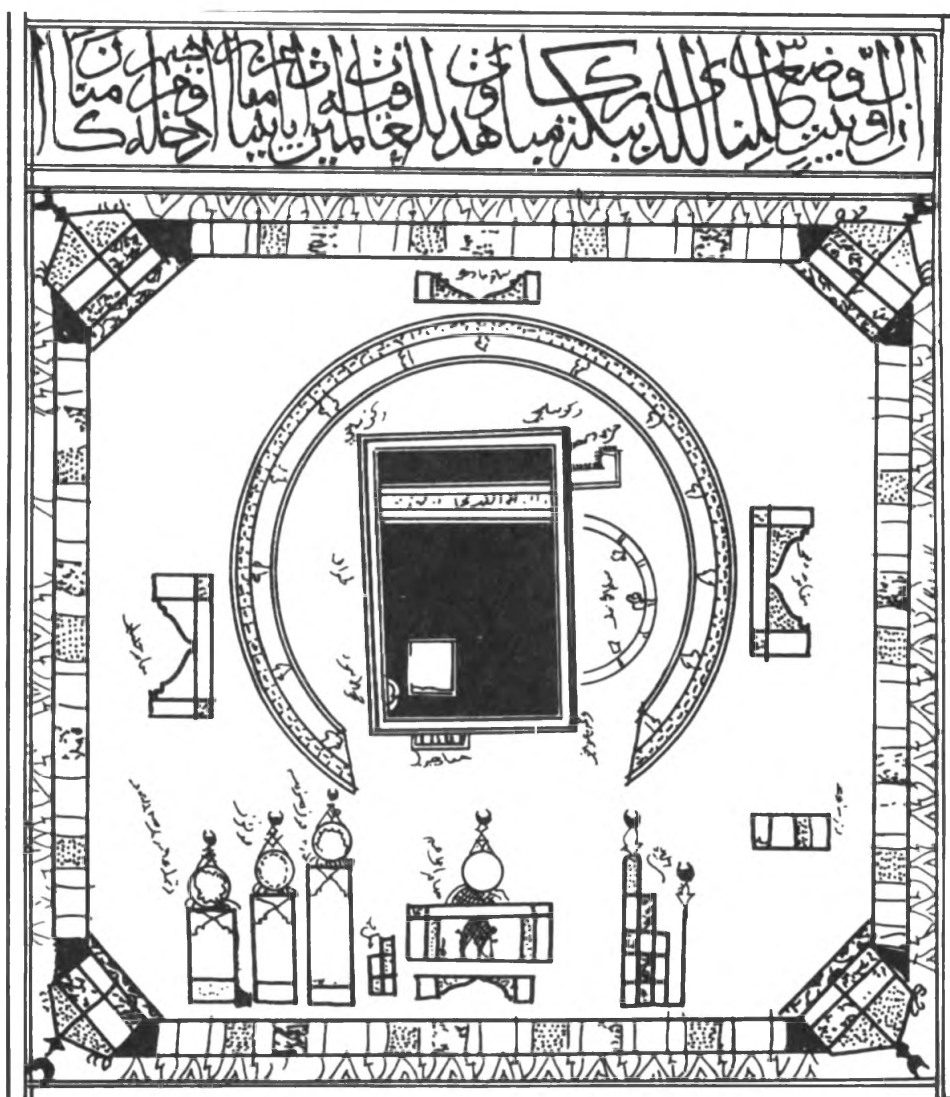


Figure 10. This fifteenth-century tourist map depicts the most important elements of the Great Mosque; the square outer walls enclose the courtyard where the black rectangular Ka'ba stands in the center, with the black stone in its eastern corner at the lower left and near the small door. Unlike most temples, the corners, rather than the sides, are oriented to the compass directions.

their ritual circumambulations (*ṭawāf*) of the Ka'ba. Among the traditions associated with this stone is one that says it was originally an angel whose duty it was to prevent Adam from partaking of the forbidden fruit, but "at the crucial moment, the angel had not paid attention, not

thinking that Adam would ever really sin.”<sup>13</sup> As punishment for his lapse of concentration, the angel was changed “into a white stone, [which was] destined to be placed in the wall of the Ka‘ba at Mecca until Judgment Day.”<sup>14</sup> Although the stone was originally white, over time it has turned black “because it rubs off the impurities from the souls of the pilgrims when they simply touch it.”<sup>15</sup> A similar tradition says that the stone represents “‘the right hand of God upon earth,’ [which during the resurrection] will have two eyes to see, and a tongue to speak and give testimony on behalf of those who have kissed it in the sincerity of their hearts.”<sup>16</sup> The stone is thus one of the important elements that contributes to the sacredness of the Ka‘ba. Other elements will be identified as we work through the typology.

### **The Great Mosque, Its Ka‘ba, and Lundquist’s Typology**

Our research identifies at least thirteen points of correlation between the Great Mosque, the Ka‘ba, and Lundquist’s typology.<sup>17</sup> While each of these points individually may be passed off as coincidence, collectively they illuminate a significant pattern. The Great Mosque and its Ka‘ba are steeped in symbols and traditions intimately connected with ancient Near Eastern temple complexes. Just as those temple complexes provided a centralized unifying force for their communities, so too the Great Mosque provides a similar function for an ever-growing international community of Muslims. In order to highlight the temple function of the Great Mosque and its Ka‘ba, we will identify the thirteen points of correspondence with Lundquist’s typology and discuss each in terms of Islamic tradition.

**1. "The temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain."<sup>18</sup>**

Throughout the ancient Near East, mountains were associated with sacred space. The cosmic mountain can be either a natural mountain, as was the case with Mount Sinai,<sup>19</sup> or a symbolic representation, as was the case with the pyramids of Egypt and the ziggurats of Mesopotamia (see fig. 12, p. 307). In the Qur'ān the House or the sacred precinct is associated with a mountain:

By the Mount<sup>20</sup>  
and a Book inscribed  
in a parchment unrolled,  
by the House inhabited  
and the roof uplifted  
and the sea swarming,  
surely thy Lord's chastisement is about to fall;  
there is none to avert it. (sura 52:1–8)

Mecca is situated between two mountains and is considered to be inseparably connected to them.<sup>21</sup> In addition, three aspects of the Ka'ba are associated with mountain symbolism. First, Islamic tradition identifies the place where Abraham built the Ka'ba as either a "small, brown hill" or a "round, red hill."<sup>22</sup> An account from eastern Turkey records that before the flood "Gabriel raised up the Well-appointed House and gave it a place in the fourth sphere of heaven." In its place Gabriel "brought a mountain of the same dimensions as that house and set it down in the place of the Well-appointed House" where it remained until the time of Abraham. When Abraham was commanded to build the Ka'ba "the mountain moved from its place and Gabriel said: 'Build it there!'"<sup>23</sup>

Second, tradition has Abraham building the Ka'ba from rocks taken from five mountains: "Mount Sinai, the Mount



of Olives, Mount Ḥirā, Mount Libanon and Mount Jūdī.”<sup>24</sup> Third, tradition places the Ka‘ba opposite the polar star, which is the highest point in the heavens. Al-Kisā’ī writes the following: “Tradition says: the polestar proves that the Ka‘ba is the highest situated territory; for it lies over against the centre of heaven.”<sup>25</sup> The Ka‘ba, therefore, in Islamic tradition has important ties to the cosmic mountain of Lundquist’s typology.

**2. “The cosmic mountain represents the primordial hillock, the place which first emerged from the waters that covered the earth during the creative process.”<sup>26</sup>**

Wensinck explains that Islamic tradition initially associated the primordial hillock with Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> However, the site of the primordial hillock was transferred to Mecca when the Jewish tribes of Medina rejected Muhammad, and the *qibla* (direction of prayer) was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. Thus Mecca becomes the first land to appear out of the waters of chaos. The creation began by stretching out the earth around this center. “The first land to appear upon the face of the water was Mecca. Then God unfolded the earth out from under it.”<sup>28</sup> In a more detailed description, Yāqūt writes, “The first land which God created on the earth is the place of Mecca. Then God unrolled the land from under the earth. [This place] is the navel of the earth, the middle of the world and the mother of cities, for it has the Ka‘ba. A wall surrounds Mecca, and Mecca is surrounded by the sacred precinct, and the sacred precinct is surrounded by the world.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the Qur’ān refers to Mecca as the “Mother of Cities” (sura 42:7), and Muslims view Mecca and its Ka‘ba as the center of the world, with all things radiating from them.<sup>30</sup>

**3. "The temple is often associated with the waters of life which flow forth from a spring within the building itself."<sup>31</sup>**

Ṭabarī taught that before heaven and earth were created, the Ka'ba was upon the waters.<sup>32</sup> Today the waters of life flow from a sacred well in the southeast of the Ka'ba in the Great Mosque known as the Zamzam or the "Well of Ishmael." The shaft of the well is approximately "130 feet in depth" and "possesses the miraculous property that its level will never fall,"<sup>33</sup> regardless of how much water the pilgrims to the Ka'ba use. Islamic tradition associates this well with the biblical story of Abraham and Hagar. When Hagar and her son Ishmael were cast out by Abraham, they became desperate for water after their small supply was spent. Hagar went in search of water. After going back and forth between Safa and Marwa seven times, the Zamzam well miraculously appeared. One tradition says that water gushed out after Ishmael dug the earth with his finger,<sup>34</sup> while another tradition indicates that Gabriel uncovered the water source.<sup>35</sup> Ignaz Goldziher says that long before the advent of Islam, the Persians "claim to have made pilgrimages to this holy spring in honour of Abraham."<sup>36</sup> Today, pilgrims to the area view the water as having special health-giving powers. They drink the water and "take it home with them to give to the sick."<sup>37</sup>

**4. "The temple is built on separate, sacral, set-apart space."<sup>38</sup>**

Islamic traditions emphasize the sacred nature of both the origin and the earthly location of the Ka'ba. There are two traditions about its origin—according to one tradition the Ka'ba originated in heaven; after Adam's expulsion God caused "the House in Mecca to descend."<sup>39</sup> In yet

another tradition God commanded Adam “to build a house to resemble the Visited House.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, after the flood<sup>41</sup> Abraham was commanded to rebuild the Ka’ba. It is the latter of these two traditions that is important for this point in Lundquist’s typology.

Steven Holloway says that “in the ancient Near East, when God commands a human being to construct a building, that building is a temple.”<sup>42</sup> These traditions about Adam and Abraham certainly meet Holloway’s criteria.

Furthermore, Mircea Eliade makes it clear that humans do not choose sacred ground. Rather, it is transformed from the profane through either “a dazzling hierophany, or the principles of cosmology . . . or by a ‘sign’ expressing a hierophany.”<sup>43</sup> There are a number of traditions where this principle is observed in God’s command to Abraham to build the Ka’ba. We have noted above the removal of a mountain to provide a place for the building. Other traditions say that when given the command to build, Abraham was stymied because he did not know the dimensions. God, therefore, provided a visible sign to give Abraham the needed dimensions. One version says that God “sent a cloud the size of the Kaaba and told him to dig foundations not to exceed the size of the cloud,”<sup>44</sup> while another says that “a snake came and curled up on the spot” and that “Abraham built the Ka’ba according to the dimensions of the snake.”<sup>45</sup> Thus the Ka’ba qualifies as sacred ground because its location was determined by a “dramatic irruption of the sacred.”<sup>46</sup>

**5. “The temple is oriented toward the four world regions or cardinal directions, and to various celestial bodies such as the polar star.”<sup>47</sup>**

We have already noted one detail relevant to this point: the tradition that places the Ka’ba opposite the polar star.

The oblong nature of the present Ka'ba means that it is much more difficult to establish that it is oriented toward the four world regions or cardinal directions. A. J. Wensinck argues that "four lines drawn from the centre through the four corners . . . would roughly indicate the four points of the compass."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps more definitive evidence for this point of the typology is that earlier structures were much more closely aligned to the cardinal directions. For example, although the front of the present Ka'ba with the door in it faces the northeast, one *ḥadīth* relates Muhammad as saying, "Were your nation not close to the Pre-Islāmic Period of Ignorance, I would have had the Ka'ba demolished and would have included in it the portion which had been left, and would have made it at a level with the ground and *would have made two doors for it, one towards the east and the other towards the west, and then by doing this it would have been built on the foundations laid by Abraham.*"<sup>49</sup> According to this *ḥadīth*, the foundations of Abraham were much more closely aligned to the cardinal directions than the present Ka'ba indicates. Tha'labī also taught that the Ka'ba that God brought down from heaven for Adam had two doors, one on the east and another on the west.<sup>50</sup>

Lundquist points out that the cosmic orientation can thus be used as "an astronomical observatory, the main purpose of which is to assist the temple priests in regulating the ritual calendar."<sup>51</sup> The Islamic calendar follows a lunar cycle. The time of the yearly *ḥajj* (the major pilgrimage to the Ka'ba) is determined by the phases of the moon and rotates throughout the seasons of the year.<sup>52</sup> In addition, this cosmic orientation reflects the idea that the earthly temple is a copy or counterpart of a heavenly model. F. E. Peters confirms the traditional Islamic claims that God built the original Ka'ba for Adam on the plan of his own

residence in heaven.<sup>53</sup> We shall return to this concept in point seven.

**6. “Temples, in their architectonic orientation, express the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven.”<sup>54</sup>**

The Mesopotamian ziggurat is probably the best example of a structure with an architectonic orientation portraying the idea of successive ascension to heaven. It was constructed with varying numbers of levels—usually three, five, or seven. The upper level was reached by a monumental staircase. The worshipers ascended the staircase, and deity descended from heaven to meet them.<sup>55</sup> The place of the meeting between the two realms was a place of great sacredness.

Although the Great Mosque’s architecture is not as clear in its successive orientation as that of the ziggurats, different levels are still suggested. The Ka’ba is surrounded by a roadway on which the pilgrims make their ritual circumambulations. The roadway lies below the level of both the floor of the Ka’ba and the courtyard of the mosque.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the door to the Ka’ba is about seven feet above the ground. It is reached by a wooden staircase that runs on wheels and is pushed up to the door.<sup>57</sup> The symbolism of this design as a meeting place between the immortal and mortal realms is reinforced by the experience of Muhammad’s night journey and ascension (*al-mi‘rāj*) into heaven. The Qur’ān explicitly states that Muhammad was taken from the “Holy Mosque” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; sura 17:1)<sup>58</sup> to Jerusalem, from where he ascended up to heaven.<sup>59</sup>

**7. "The plan and measurements of the temple are revealed by God to the king, and the plan must be carefully carried out."<sup>60</sup>**

The temple structure represents the earthly replica of a heavenly counterpart. It is therefore necessary that the earthly design and measurements be accurate. Adam was commanded to build the Ka'ba so that it resembled the Visited House.<sup>61</sup> Islamic traditions describe the heavenly mosque as the place in the seventh heaven where angels worship. Jan Knappert records that "God creates seventy thousand new angels . . . every morning" specifically so that they can worship him and that each morning the "angel Jibril [Gabriel] calls the faithful to prayer from the minaret that was created out of pure diamond."<sup>62</sup> Given the prominence of the angel Jibril in the heavenly mosque, it is therefore not surprising that he also plays an important role in some traditions concerning the establishment of its earthly counterpart. "He [i.e., Gabriel] also told [Adam] that God commanded him to build there [i.e., in Mecca] His House, which is the Kaaba, which he should circumambulate and in which he should offer prayer as he had seen the angels do at the Visited House."<sup>63</sup> We have already noted the supernatural direction given to Abraham to ensure the correct dimensions of the Ka'ba. Thus the building of the earthly Ka'ba was under the control and supervision of the divine realm.

**8. Temples are associated with initiation "into the presence of deity."<sup>64</sup>**

Each year when the Israelite high priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, he symbolically

entered the presence of God. Similarly, during the three Israelite pilgrim festivals of the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles, all Israelite men were required to go to the temple and appear before the Lord (see Exodus 23:14–17). For Muslims, their visit to the Ka‘ba represents a similar concept.<sup>65</sup> Tha‘labī taught that when God brought down the Ka‘ba for Adam he told him to “circumambulate it just as you circumambulate the throne [of God]. Come to it just as you come to the throne.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, as pilgrims enter the area made sacred by the Ka‘ba, they purify themselves in anticipation of coming into the presence of God. One pilgrim described the emotions he felt when he prayed at the Ka‘ba: “Truly we were at that hour in another world: we were in the house of God and in God’s immediate presence.”<sup>67</sup>

Upon entering the Great Mosque, the pilgrims, as part of the ritual, circumambulate the Ka‘ba seven times. This is symbolic of the actions performed by the angels in heaven as they circle the throne of God.<sup>68</sup> Hence, each pilgrim symbolically enters the presence of God and encircles his throne. When the pilgrims return home they are entitled to add the epithet *ḥājj* or *ḥājji* (male) or *ḥājja* (female) (i.e., one who has performed the pilgrimage) to their name. They “will be met with joy and respect, possibly in a festive and ceremonial manner. In general, [their] prestige in the community will be increased and, in the outlying regions of the Muslim world, [they] will become a center of religious fervor and missionary activity.”<sup>69</sup>

**9. “The temple is associated with the realm of the dead, the underworld, the afterlife, the grave.”<sup>70</sup>**

Lundquist argues that the “rites and worship of ancestors” serve as the connecting link to the realm of the dead,

the underworld, the afterlife, and the grave.<sup>71</sup> Among the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Hittites, tombs and temples were integrally joined. The temple was viewed as the “link between this world and the next.”<sup>72</sup>

The Ka'ba serves a similar function in Islam. On one level, the pilgrimage to Mecca—required of each Muslim who is financially able—represents death. Ali Shariati taught that

Before departing to perform the Hajj, all of your debts should be paid. Your hates and angers toward relatives or friends must disappear. A will must be drawn. All of these gestures are an exercise in the preparation for death (which will overtake everyone some day). . . .

Now you are free to join eternity.<sup>73</sup>

On another level, tradition places the graves of over seventy prophets beneath *al-Hijr* (the screen or the partition) in the Great Mosque. These include Adam, Eve,<sup>74</sup> Hagar,<sup>75</sup> and Ishmael.<sup>76</sup> In fact, “Every prophet, after his people had perished, would establish himself at [Mecca]; there he and his followers with him used to perform worship till he died.”<sup>77</sup> Some traditions even place the grave of Muhammad in Mecca despite the traditional site in Medina. They argue that Muhammad and all prophets belong to Mecca because “this is his essential starting point and termination of his career.” Thus, they argue, “Mecca is his real grave.”<sup>78</sup> Muslims around the world reflect their desire to be associated with the Ka'ba at death by being oriented in their graves to face the Ka'ba.<sup>79</sup>

This connection with the rites of ancestors is further reinforced by Muhammad's pronouncement that it is acceptable for people to perform the *hajj* on behalf of elderly relatives. One *hadith* says, “Hazrat Ibn Abbas relates: A woman asked the Holy Prophet: ‘O messenger of Allah, the pilgrimage has been made obligatory duty by Allah on his



servants at a time when my father has reached old age and has not strength to ride an animal. Can I perform the pilgrimage on his behalf?' He answered, 'Yes!'"<sup>80</sup> Today Muslims have extended this injunction to include deceased family relatives.<sup>81</sup> The vicarious pilgrim uses money from the deceased's estate to cover the costs of the journey to Mecca. However, the pilgrim himself receives no personal religious benefit from such a pilgrimage.<sup>82</sup>

#### 10. "God's word is revealed in the temple."<sup>83</sup>

Temple sanctuaries have often been the site of divine revelation. Isaiah received his prophetic call while in the temple, and Moses received revelation on Mount Sinai.<sup>84</sup> In the Great Mosque, during the early Islamic period, revelation of God's will usually came "in the course of an incubation, that is, sleeping in a sacred place."<sup>85</sup> We have already noted Muhammad's night journey and ascension into heaven, which began at the Ka'ba, but tradition also records others who received revelation while in the Great Mosque. Uri Rubin records a number of those traditions:

It is related that Kināna heard a voice while sleeping in Ḥijr, telling him about his future. Al-Naḍr b. Kināna dreamt in the same place that a cosmic luminous tree was emerging from his loins which symbolized his noble descendants, and especially Muḥammad. 'Abd al Muṭṭalib dreamt in the Ḥijr that a cosmic chain grew out of his body and turned into a green tree. He also dreamt there that he was dressed in a beautiful robe which meant that it was time for him to marry. In the same place, 'Abd al Muṭṭalib was also inspired by a series of dreams to dig Zamzam. Āmina, Muḥammad's mother, dreamt in the Ḥijr that she was about to give birth to "Aḥmad," the lord of mankind.<sup>86</sup>

These revelations underscore the sacred nature of the Great Mosque and its importance as a conduit linking the earthly and heavenly spheres.

### 11. "The temple and its ritual are enshrouded in secrecy."<sup>87</sup>

Lundquist points out that "secrecy relates to the sacredness of the temple precinct and the strict division in ancient times between sacred and profane space."<sup>88</sup> At Herod's Temple, signs were posted forbidding gentiles to enter.<sup>89</sup> When Muhammad returned in triumph to Mecca from Medina, he cleansed the Ka'ba of its pagan deities and dedicated it to the worship of God. Muhammad subsequently received a revelation restricting Mecca and its environs to Muslims:

O believers, the idolaters are indeed unclean; so let them not come near the Holy Mosque after this year of theirs.  
(sura 9:28)

Since that revelation, a sacred zone (*ḥaram*) has encompassed Mecca. The profane zone is clearly delineated from the sacred by checkpoints on all roads leading into Mecca. It is forbidden for non-Muslims to pass these points, and those Muslims entering the city to take part in either of the two pilgrimages must be in a state of ritual purity (*iḥrām*).<sup>90</sup> This purification is accomplished by performing ablutions, putting on a ritual garment (also known as *iḥrām*), making a declaration of intention, and offering prayers.<sup>91</sup>

### 12. "The temple is a place of sacrifice."<sup>92</sup>

It is said that in pre-Islamic times animal sacrifice was performed at the Ka'ba and that the blood was smeared on the Black Stone.<sup>93</sup> In fact, one tradition says that Abraham's father Terah made sacrifice at the Ka'ba.<sup>94</sup> Islam is,

in principle, opposed to blood sacrifice. As the Qurʾān reveals, “The flesh of them [i.e., that of sacrificial animals] shall not reach God, neither their blood, but godliness from you shall reach Him” (sura 22:37). However, earlier in the same revelation, sacrifice is associated with the Kaʿba: “There are things therein profitable to you unto a stated term; thereafter their lawful place of sacrifice is by the Ancient House” (sura 22:33).<sup>95</sup> We have at least one *ḥadīth* that describes Muhammad sacrificing camels during the rite of standing.<sup>96</sup> Another *ḥadīth* describes Muhammad offering sacrifice at the end of the *ḥajj* between Safa and Marwa,<sup>97</sup> a practice that has continued into modern times. However, while the sacrifices do not actually occur at the Kaʿba, Burton noted that the animals’ faces are turned toward it before they are killed.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the blood sacrifices, it should be noted that the *ḥajj* itself is a form of sacrifice for many of the pilgrims. Usually people save for many years to make the trip.<sup>99</sup> Ali Shariati indicates that at Mina the pilgrim acts as Abraham who “brought his son [Ishmael] to sacrifice.” He suggests that for modern pilgrims the Ishmael that they sacrifice could be any one of a number of worldly possessions. Then he says,

Whoever and whatever, you should have brought it with you to sacrifice here. I cannot tell you which one, but I can give you some clues to help—whatever weakens your faith, whatever stops you from “going”, whatever distracts you from accepting responsibilities, whatever causes you to be self-centered, whatever makes you unable to hear the message and confess the truth, whatever forces you to “escape”, whatever causes you to rationalize for the sake of convenience, whatever makes you blind and deaf. . . . You are in the position of Ibrahim whose weakness was in his love for [Ishmael] (his son).

He was teased by Satan. Imagine yourself at the peak of honor, full of pride and there is only ONE THING for which you can give up everything and sacrifice any other love for its love. THAT IS YOUR [ISHMAEL]! Your [Ishmael] can be a person, an object, a rank, a position or even a “weakness”!<sup>100</sup>

Thus, in both ancient and modern times, pilgrimage to the Ka'ba was closely tied to sacrifice.

**13. “The temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution” and “plays a legitimizing political role in the ancient Near East.”<sup>101</sup>**

In this section we have chosen to combine two of Lundquist's points because they are closely associated. The idea of transferring the pilgrimage to Islam appears to have developed while Muhammad was in Medina. Although the *umma* (Islamic community) was growing with converts from the local Arab tribes, Muhammad sought to unify all the Arab tribes under the banner of Islam. Paul Wheatley suggests that the Ka'ba enabled Muhammad to make “the transformation from a kin-based society to a rudimentary state organization.”<sup>102</sup> In doing so, he was able to unify numerous tribal factions into a single unified group: the Ka'ba became a unifying force for Muhammad.

As a result, ever since Muhammad took control of Mecca and cleansed the Ka'ba during the seventh century, Muslims from around the world have turned their eyes, hearts, and thoughts five times a day to the Ka'ba in Mecca. The idea of *qibla* (direction of prayer) is a dramatic symbol of the unity of the Islamic *umma* worldwide. It has become a “powerful implosion of religious energy”<sup>103</sup> and brings about a feeling of intense unity among Muslims. Frederick Denny informs us: “When the Muslim performs the salat

[ritual prayer], he or she is in a sense participating in the heavenly journey of the Prophet Muhammad; a little personal *miʿrāj* is made.”<sup>104</sup>

The Kaʿba is also the central focus of the *ḥajj*. The pilgrims focus on the Kaʿba a number of times during the *ḥajj*. They perform the *ṭawāf* (circumambulations) three times: at the beginning of the *ḥajj*, after they return from Arafat, and at its conclusion. Thus, the *ḥajj* is also a powerful example of the unifying effect that the Kaʿba provides for Islam.

## Conclusion

The central importance of the temple and its associated institutions in the ancient world has long been noted by scholars. The temple was the source of religious, political, and economic stability for the ancient temple states. The temple and its rituals enabled the ancients to make sense of the vicissitudes of life and to set their lives in order according to the will of the gods. In this paper we have used Muslim sources to show how Mecca, with its Great Mosque and Kaʿba, fits into that ancient temple typology. In at least thirteen aspects it relates to other ancient Near Eastern temples. Further research is needed to establish the extent to which the remaining points might also be associated with the Great Mosque, but there is sufficient evidence in the foregoing discussion to posit a substantial connection with ancient temple ideology and practices, even though Muslims do not specifically view the Great Mosque as a temple. By viewing the Great Mosque from a temple perspective, we can see that at least one aspect of Islam’s development was not an isolated phenomenon but was intimately connected with a long and illustrious history of temple-ordered societies.

## Notes

1. See John M. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East," in *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984), 53–75. This article expands on two earlier articles: "The Legitimizing Role of the Temple in the Origin of the State," in *Society of Biblical Literature: 1982 Seminar Papers*, ed. Kent H. Richards (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 271–97, and "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 205–19.

2. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 206.

3. Uri Rubin, "The KA'BA: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 105.

4. For examples, see Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals* (New York: Schuman, 1951), 20, and Heribert Busse, "Jerusalem and Mecca, the Temple and the Kaaba: An Account of Their Interrelation in Islamic Times," in *The Holy Land in History and Thought*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 236–46.

5. W. M. Thackston Jr., trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 305.

6. Busse, "Jerusalem and Mecca," 237.

7. Ibid.

8. All quotations from the Qur'ān are taken from Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

9. See F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 7.

10. Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), 2010.

11. A. J. Wensinck, "Ka'ba," in *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913–1936*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 4:584–85. See the lavish color photographs by Peter Sanders in

Greg Noakes, "The Servants of God's House," *Aramco World* (January–February 1999): 48–67.

12. Zahra Freeth and H. V. F. Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia: From the Renaissance to the End of the Victorian Era* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), 101.

13. Jan Knappert, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints, and Prophets of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 1:81.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. S. M. Zwemer, "The Palladium of Islam," *Muslim World* 23 (April 1933): 111.

17. The remaining five points in Lundquist's typology (see "The Common Temple Typology," 57, 59) are that "the temple is associated with the tree of life," "sacral, communal meals are carried out in connection with temple ritual, often at the conclusion of or during a covenant ceremony," "the tablets of destiny (or tablets of the decrees) are consulted in the cosmic sense by the gods," "there is a close interrelationship between the temple and law in the ancient Near East," and "the temple and its cult are central to the economic structure of ancient Near Eastern society."

18. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 207.

19. For an excellent discussion on Mount Sinai as a temple, see Donald W. Parry, "Sinai as Sanctuary and Mountain of God," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 482–500.

20. This mount refers to the place where Muhammad received his revelation.

21. See A. J. Wensinck, *The Ideas of the Western Semites concerning the Navel of the Earth* (Amsterdam: Muller, 1916), 11, 13.

22. Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 74. See also Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. Muhammad M. Khan (New Delhi: Kitāb Bhavan,

1984), 4:378–79; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1968), 1:547–48.

23. Al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets: Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*: *An Eastern Turkish Version*, trans. H. E. Boeschoten, J. O'Kane, and M. Vandamme (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:129.

24. Ibid.; see also Tha'labī, *Kitāb 'Arā'is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1340), 61–62; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1:546; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1955–57), 4:465.

25. Translation and original Arabic script in Wensink, *Navel of the Earth*, 15.

26. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 208.

27. See Wensinck, *Navel of the Earth*, 18.

28. Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 3–4; translation by Brian Hauglid; see also A. J. Wensinck, "The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology," *Acta Orientalia* 1 (1922): 175.

29. Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 4:463; translation by Brian Hauglid.

30. "Thus the first village to be built was Mecca and the first house was the Glorious Kaaba." Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 62.

31. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 208.

32. See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1:547–48.

33. Von Grunebaum, *Mohammadan Festivals*, 24.

34. See Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 152; Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, 74; see also Grant Alexander, "The Story of the Ka'ba," *Moslem World* 28 (1938): 45; Robin Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia* (London: Hamlyn, 1976), 31.

35. See A. Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 45; Al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 119.

36. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1966–77), 1:136.

37. B. Carra de Vaux, "Zamzam," in *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 8:1212.

38. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 209.



39. M. J. Kister, "Legends in tafsīr and ḥadīth Literature," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 107. See also Abd-al-Razzāq, *Al-Muṣannaḥ* (Gujarat, India: Majlis Ilmi, 1972), 94; Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 60.

40. Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisaʿi*, 62. The "Visited House" refers to the "heavenly prototype of the Kaaba." *Ibid.*, 339 n. 14.

41. There are two main traditions about what happened to the Kaʿba during the flood. One tradition maintains that it was taken into "the fourth sphere of heaven" (Al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 129; Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 61; see also Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisaʿi*, 102). Another reports that "the waters of the Deluge did not reach the Kaʿba, but that they surrounded it" and that the "Kaʿba itself remained free in the air" (*Khamis* 1:92:21; original Arabic script and translation in Wensinck, *Navel of the Earth*, 15; see also Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:546).

42. Steven Holloway, "What Ship Goes There? The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology" (unpublished paper), 9.

43. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 369.

44. Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisaʿi*, 154. See also Al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 129; Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, 73.

45. Al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 129.

46. Mircea Eliade, "The Prestige of the Cosmogonic Myth," *Diogenes* 23 (fall 1958): 2.

47. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 210.

48. Wensinck, "Kaʿba," 4:584. Compare F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13.

49. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:383–84, emphasis added.

50. See Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 25.

51. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology," 57.
52. See Richard C. Martin, "Pilgrimage: Muslim Pilgrimage," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 11:339.
53. See Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, 10.
54. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 211.
55. See Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology," 57–58.
56. See Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Muslim Institutions* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), 85.
57. See Wensinck, "Ka'ba," 4:585.
58. Al-Hasan reportedly heard Muhammad say that Gabriel came to him while he "was sleeping in the [Ḥijr]." Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 182. One commentary, in a footnote to *masjid*, says, "here it refers to the Ka'ba at [Mecca]." Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Medina, Saudi Arabia: Islamic Researches, 1413 hijrī [1992/3 C.E.]), 774. These two apparent contradictions may be reconciled by U. Rubin's argument that the pre-Qurayshī Ḥijr "was an integral part of the sanctuary, so that both the Ḥijr and the Ka'ba formed one unit, being a sacred ring-like enclosure, made of loose stones and covered with the *kiswa*." Rubin, "The KA'BA," 101. This situation probably gives rise to the following *ḥadīth*: "I asked the Prophet whether the round wall (near Ka'ba) [i.e., the Ḥijr] was part of the Ka'ba. The Prophet replied in the affirmative. I further said, 'What is wrong with them, why have they not included it in the building of the Ka'ba?' He said, 'Don't you see that your people (Quraysh) ran short of money (so they could not include it inside the building of the Ka'ba)?"' Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:382–83.
59. Busse argues that "there is ample evidence that the localisation of these events in Jerusalem was preceded by their localisation in Mecca. This is attested by traditions on the Ascension in which Jerusalem is not mentioned at all, which means that *isrā'* [Muhammad's night journey] was at first understood as Muhammad's Ascension to heaven from the [Ka'ba]. . . . This was possible because the Arabs believed already in pre-Islamic times

that the [Ka'ba] had a heavenly counterpart." Busse, "Jerusalem and Mecca," 242.

60. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 211.

61. See Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 62.

62. Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, 1:28–29.

63. Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 61; see also Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, 74–75; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1:546, 548.

64. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 212–13.

65. For a good description of the pilgrimage (*hajj*), see Ali Shariati, *Hajj*, trans. Ali A. Behzadnia and Najla Denny (Houston, Tex.: Free Islamic Literatures, 1978).

66. Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 60; translation by Brian Hauglid.

67. As quoted by Wensinck, "Ka'ba," 4:588.

68. See Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 61; and Ahmad Kamal, *The Sacred Journey, Being Pilgrimage to Makkah* (New York: Van Rees, 1961), 43.

69. Von Grunebaum, *Mohammadan Festivals*, 41.

70. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 215.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

73. Shariati, *Hajj*, 6.

74. "They laid him [i.e., Adam] in a grave, his head at the site of the Kaaba and his feet stretched out," and Eve was buried along side of him. Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 84–85.

75. See Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, 74.

76. See Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 154; Wensinck, "Ka'ba," 4:585.

77. Wensinck, *Navel of the Earth*, 28.

78. Al-Ḥalabī, 1:197, as cited in Wensinck, "Ka'ba," 4:590.

79. See Martin, "Pilgrimage: Muslim Pilgrimage," 11:338.

80. Number 1279, in *Riyadh-Us-Saleheen: English Translation with Arabic Text*, comp. Yahya B. S. An-Nawawi, trans. S. M. Madni Abbasi (Karachi: Dar Ahya Us-Sunnah Al Nabawiya, n.d.), 2:616.

81. See Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The House of 'Imrān*, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 2 (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 266; Martin, "Pilgrimage: Muslim Pilgrimage," 11:340; see also James A. Toronto, "Islam," in *Religions of the World: A Latter-day Saint View*, rev. and enl. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1997), 230.

82. See von Grunebaum, *Mohammadan Festivals*, 16.

83. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology," 59.

84. Spencer W. Kimball received the revelation that extended the blessings of the priesthood to all worthy male members of the Church "after extended meditation and prayer in the sacred rooms of the holy temple" (Official Declaration—2).

85. Peters, *The Hajj*, 16.

86. Rubin, "The KA'BA," 112–13.

87. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 218.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Josephus records that "When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that sanctuary;' for that second [court of the] temple was called 'the Sanctuary,'" *Wars* 5.2. In 1871 one of these warnings was discovered by Clermont-Ganneau. It reads: "No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues." Cited in C. K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background: Writings from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire That Illuminate Christian Origins*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 53.

90. See Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia*, 116.

91. See Shariati, *Hajj*, 8–16; Kamal, *The Sacred Journey*, 21–23.

92. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 217.

93. See Wensinck, "Ka'ba," 4:591, and Rubin, "The KA'BA," 105–7.

94. See Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, 136.

95. F. E. Peters notes the following, "At the time of this verse the place of sacrifice was apparently still near the Ka'ba, as it had been throughout Islamic times." It was only "during the Farewell Pilgrimage [that] the Prophet limited sacrifice to the 'slaughtering place' at Mina." Peters, *The Hajj*, 368 n. 139.

96. See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:362.

97. See *ibid.*, 2:376.

98. See Richard F. Burton, *The Guidebook: A Pictorial Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina* (London: Clowes and Sons, 1865), 38.

99. See Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 130.

100. Shariati, *Hajj*, 84.

101. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology," 58–59.

102. Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), 288.

103. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 120.

104. *Ibid.*