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Analysis of the Substantive Distinction between Medina (City) and Gharieh (Village) in the Quranic Literature

Mohammad Mannan Raeesi*

Abstract

The holy Quran as the most significant religious text of Muslims has a remarkable aptitude in various aspects of human knowledge which is often neglected. Many researches have studied the Islamic city since city and city elements are mentioned in this holy book. Accordingly, this paper tries to investigate if the common difference between city and village is a matter of importance in the holy Quran. In other words, this paper seeks the indicator(s) of city and village distinction in the holy Quran. Therefore, Medina (village) and Gharieh (village), as the two main keywords, are analyzed in the holy Quran and investigated by a combination of research methods (combination of qualitative content analysis method and logical reasoning method). The findings suggest that unlike the current theories in the field of urban development, Quran does not recognize different economic, social and even population factors as the main factors in distinguishing villages from cities. In Quranic literature, the factor that makes a city distinct from a village is the level of faith in God and commitment to Islam. So that a habitat, disregarding of population and size city, cannot be entitled as Medina (city) in case it lacks these factors. The claim has been established and proved in the body of this study by comparison of various Quranic literatures containing the words Medina (city) and Gharieh (village).

Keywords

Holy Quran, Medina (city), Ghariyeh (village), Faith.

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*. Ph.D. in Architecture, Assistant Professor, University of Qom. mannan_raeesi@yahoo.com

Introduction

The definition of city and its features is the most fundamental issue in the field of urban development. Currently, no consensus is achieved among experts. Therefore, various definitions for city have been presented based on different looks of the experts to social, economic, physical and other aspects. Today, numerous books and articles have been written in order to define city features. However, the aim of this paper is not to review these features or define city based on the previous studies. This paper tries to investigate if there are other factors and indicators that can distinguish between city definitions of Islamic literature and common definitions offered by experts.

Accordingly, this study seeks to find out what factors are considered in definition of city in Quran. Does this holy book, as a divine holy book acquitted of any mistake, acknowledge the common indicators and definitions of city or does it tend to introduce new meaning to define city? In other words, is the common definition of city is the same as the definition of city in Quranic language? Considering the contently scientific enrichment of Quran, discussing all the chapters and verses of the Holy Quran in order to respond these queries is not within the scope of an article. However some relevant verses, especially verses of Surah Ya-Sin in which subtle hints about this issue is observed, are to be put into scrutiny according to the scientific knowledge of the author.

Hence, the specific objective of this study is to explain what "city" means and analyzing the substantive distinction of it from "village" in Quranic literature. Initially, it should be noted that the word city in Arabic is synonymous with "Medina" and the term human settlement or a habitat in a smaller scale (e.g. village) is synonymous with the term "Gharieh" (Ragheb Isfahani, 1412 AH: 669; Bostani, 1997: 63). Al-Magdisi – a famous Arab geographer - in explaining the hierarchy of human settlements, introduces the city as a region's main town and as a rural settlement (Al-Maqdisi, 1906: 47). Basim Salim Hakim also recognizes the same

hierarchy for human settlements (Hakim, 2012: 165). However, in some studies the keyword "Balad" is used to scrutinize the Islamic city in Quran. Nevertheless, according to the author's researches, the definition of this keyword is beyond the definition of city in Arabic and Quranic verses. the word "Balad" is interpreted as "land", and not the city, in many verses such as 57 and 58 Surah A'raf, 49 Furqan and so on. As a result, the domain of research in this paper is confined to verses that contain the words "Medina" and "Gharieh" and their derivatives. Here, this paper uses a qualitative approach (i.e. the opposite of quantitative approach) in which data are collected by library and documents researches. Finally, the data is analyzed by combining research methods (combination of qualitative content analysis method and logical reasoning method).

Research Background

Most dictionaries are common in describing cities as an almost big settlement in order to compare it to a village (Goodall, 1987; Kuper & Kuper, 1996). Moein describes a city as a big village comprising streets, roads, retail stores and inhabitants (Moein, 2009). Dehkhoda also defines city in a similar explanation: "Medina and Balad and a collection of numerous houses and edifices where people inhabit in case of not being larger than a gharieh" (Dehkhoda, 1998).

Among various philosophers, Aristotle is the first to offer a statutory definition of city by distinguishing city from village: "Finally, a community that results from the provision of several villages is called a city that has come to perfection in terms of ability to meet its needs. To be more precise, if the emergence of any city is for being; its existence is for well-being...A city is the ultimate point of perfection of communities" (Aristotle, 1985:4).

In different studies, several indicators have been introduced to differentiate city and village. The most important of them are: extent, condition and type of economic occupation, employment and social stratification, degree of complexity of relationships, ways of social, cultural, economic, political

institutions utilization, and ultimately the amount and composition of the population (Hosseini, 2011:50-49). These indicators can be followed in legal, geographic, historical, numerical (population) and other definitions as well (Jahanbin, 2009:20). Most urbanism thinkers have emphasized on some indicators and definitions in order to distinguish the city from village. Ratzel describes city as a permanent meeting place of humans and their dwellings versus the definitions of temporary and seasonal communities.

Max Sur who uses sociology in human geography studies, refer to city as a perfect model of social life and as a society arisen from rural community (Farid, 1996:1). Harvey calls the most significant difference of city and village owing to investment accumulation and relying on the accumulation rule, recognizes the first investment cycle processes (production of goods and services), the second investment cycle (built space creation by the growth of investment) and third investment cycle (the production of knowledge technology and information) possible all in the context of the geography of the city (Harvey, 1985).

Marx and Angles also have considerable theories. They believe that two main indicators can make a city different from village; first the way of labor division and second the way of concentration and isolation. In other words a city is created by concentration of population, concentration of production means or concentration of investment, and concentration of pleasure and needs while the village entity is the opposite and based on isolation and dispersion (Farid, 1996). Marx believes that urban and rural areas are twin compeers that are resulted from the first social labor division. He believes that labor division could lead into separation of rural and urban areas and a reason for their conflict of interest. Therefore, further development would lead to the separation of commercial and industrial work. At the same time, various labor divisions are created for the people involved in a certain type of work since labor is divided within the various branches. (Marx, 2000: 288-289). Accordingly, the desire for social organization

based on social division of labor can be the most important indicators of the city formation (Soltanzadeh, 1988:341).

It can be concluded from these discussions that the most important approaches of scholars in defining “city” and distinguishing it from “village” substantially comprises social attitudes (which define the city as a permanent and almost large settlement for people who are not socially heterogeneous). They also comprise economic attitudes (which define the city as a place of economic diversity and a habitat for traders rather than farmers). They believe all varieties of demographic and physical differences between urban and rural areas can be explained through these two main approaches. It should be noted that, despite the multiplicity of the above researches, none of them is fulfilled on the basis of Quranic reviews that highlights the innovations of this paper. However, in defining the concept of the city (unaccompanied, without comparing it to the village) many Quranic researches have been carried out of which doctor Mohammed Naghizadeh’s book are one of the most important. He has emphasized on attributes of a city, aesthetic perception and identity of the city in the light of Islamic thought and the foundations of religious art in Islamic culture (objective manifestations) to explain the different aspects of the city (especially theoretical aspects) (Naghizadeh, 2007 and Naghizadeh, 1998). Mr. Abdulhamid Noghrehkar has included some substantive discussions of Islamic city in his great work, An Introduction to Islamic identity in architecture and urbanism (Noghrehkar, 2008). Then again all of these works, despite explaining the Quranic views, have neglected to distinguish between urban and rural nature of the term. Therefore, this article seeks to address this research gap and explain the essential distinction between city and village based on Quranic literature.

Investigating Research Issue in Holy Surah Ya-Sin

As previously mentioned, one of the sources investigated for responding the research issue, are

some of the verses of Surah Ya-sin (verses 13 to 31) which are literally mentioned as follows:

(13) And put forward to them a similitude; the (story of the) dwellers of the village, when there came Messengers to them.

(15) They (people of the village) said: “You are only human beings like ourselves, and the Most Beneficent (Allah) has revealed nothing, you are only telling lies.”

(20) And there came running from the farthest part of the city, a man, saying: “O my people! Obey the Messengers;

(21) “Obey those who ask no wages of you (for themselves), and who are rightly guided.

The most important verses discussed in this article are verses 13 and 20 which are studied with a focus on the analysis above verses in the following.

Discussion

• Defining substantial distinction of Medina (city) and Gharieh (village) in Quranic literature

Following the verses presented in the previous section, this section of the Surah Ya-sin narrates a story of sending messengers of God who people living in a human settlement. Some reliable interpretations (such as Al-Mizan) believe that the holy Quran is referring to city of Antakya (Fig. 1) in current Turkey (former Syria) (Tabatabaee, 1996). The phrase “far from Medina” at the beginning of verse 20 indicates that the settlement was considerably large. If not, this verse of the Holy Quran would not express the rising place of a man who believed in God as the farthest place of the city. This claim is also in congruence with evidence and historical documents related to population and area of Antakya which will be discussed in the following.

Some historians believe that one of Alexander’s successors named Seleucus, after defeating antigons in 301 B.C., added Syria and much of Minor Asia on his vast Asian territory and built Antakya in honoring his father (Zetterholm, 2003: 19). About the size of the city before the birth of Jesus Christ in historical records, this city is introduced as one of the four

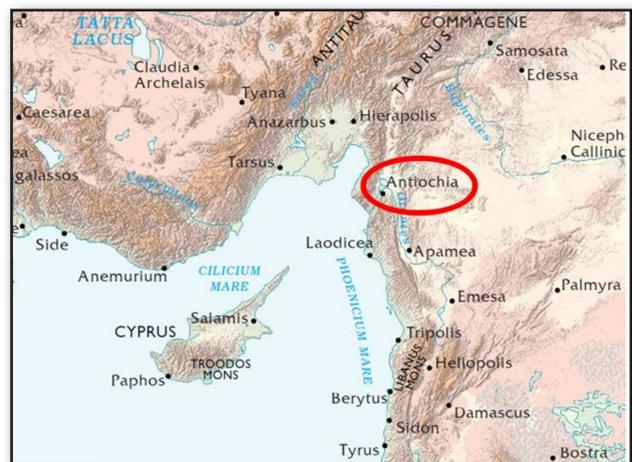


Fig. 1. The current situation of Antakya city in the south of Turkey and near the Mediterranean Sea.

Source: <http://www.numisology.com/Antioch.htm>.

major cities of the Roman world along with Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople (Raffaella, 2007: 27). Josephus, the Jewish historian, also describes Antakya as the third city after Rome and Alexandria for its magnitude and glory (Josephus, 2008: 17). This is important since what is meant by messengers of God in verse 13 were the Christ’s representatives to the city of Antakya according to Al-Mizan interpretation (Tabatabaee, 1996). Considering the city history which dates back before birth of Christ, this city must have had significant size and population at the time the messengers were sent. The estimated population of the city has been calculated approximately 150,000 people at that time with the same number of population living in the countryside (Ahmadi and Talae, 2003: 18). The subtle point investigated in this paper is that Quran has mentioned this settlement with two different interpretations; so that it is mentioned as a “Gharieh” in verse 13 and latterly in verse 20 as a “Medina” while both of these interpretations refer to a same case in a certain time and place. Therefore, there is a serious question as to why does the Quran refer to a specific physical environment once as a Gharieh (village) and again with the words Medina (city)?

Most interpretations have rather not spoken about the duality or have not offered unconvincing explanations. Some interpretations including Fotuhat

Al-Ilahiyeh and Al-Mizan have provided us with some explanations. Fotuhat Al-Ilahiyeh explains: "... and the city (in verse 20), is the same village that was mentioned in advance (in verse 13) and here is introduced as a city due to the size and breadth of the city" (Al-Jamal, n. d.: 508). As obvious, this confirms the duality in the use of the terms city and village owing to physical development of the settlement. However, this explanation does not seem logical since the terms (city and village) in the verses related to a certain time and place and thus claiming their size differences and physical development is unjustified. Al-Mizan in this regard also says: "farthest ends of the city means the farthest place from its hypothetical baseline. Firstly, village is used and here it is interpreted as Medina to highlight its size" (Tabatabaee, 1996). This reasoning doesn't seem justified either because if the village has been great, why it is not addressed as a city in verse 13, as in verse 20, knowing the fact that the words in the Quran are from an undisputed sage and certainly not without wisdom.

By following the verses and profound contemplations, the secret of this duality can be inferred from the Quranic perspective. The most important indicators of civilization and urbanization are faith in God and the requirements and demands of the faith, so that if these indicators are not seen in human settlements, it is referred as a village in Quran despite great population, breadth and etc. In verse 13, the settlement is defined with the village due to non-compliance of residents to God's messengers. This place is not worthy of the term city in Quranic perspective for denying messengers and rejecting requirements of faith in God, although the settlements is of considerable size and population. But when one of the people living in this settlement accepts the messenger and believes in God in verse 20, the village is promoted to city in Quranic literature; interestingly enough, among the people of this settlement only one person believes in God and the the singular word "man" in verse 20 and the singular pronoun in verse 22 proves the claim. However, according to Quran, the faith and belief of one man is enough to consider a settlement

of civilization and urban progress.

Further scrutinize in Quran reveals more evidences, as verses in Surah Ya-sin, in which God considered the faith and spiritual life of a man as the same value as a group's. For instance, the Holy Quran praises Ibrahim as a nation (that is plural in Arabic literature). Verily, Ibrahim was an Ummah (a nation), obedient to Allah, Hanifa (i.e. to worship none but Allah), and he was not one of those who were polytheists. (Nahl, 120). It is also stated in Surah Al-Ma'idah that enlivening a person (especially his spiritual revival) is considered as enlivening of a community;...if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind... (Ma'idah, 32).

Allama Tabatabaee interprets this verse by saying that one of the referent of the term "give life" is the individual's spiritual revival: "What is meant by giving life to a man does not refer to creating a man or giving life to a dead man, it means revival according to wise sages. When physicians treat diseases or when lifeguards save people from drowning, it is said that they made someone alive; Allah in the Holy Word uses these interpretations, such as guiding to the truth is considered reviving. Consequently, one who guides others from astray to faith, has given them life" (Tabatabaee, 1996).

According to the above explanations, it is clear that in the Quranic literature, faith and spiritual life of a person is so valuable that he alone is worthy of a collective (community) value. As a result a settlement where a theist person lives deserves the term Medina since the place of this individual's living is as of a nation. This will be discussed in the following sections.

Quran confirmations in other Surahs

There might be some mistakes claiming that Quran verses are copied or similar or the difference that is explained about Medina (city) and Gharieh (village) might be denied in other verses. Therefore,

these two words are investigated in other Surahs of Quran and their substantive difference which was previously derived from Surah Ya-Sin was modified to other verses with the word Medina or Gharieh. Consequently, the previous claim was admitted and the new investigated verses were in complete compliance with the results achieved from Surah Ya-Sin. Deep contemplation on the following verses reveals these findings.

- Verses containing the word “Gharieh”

The word village and its derivatives are repeated 57 times in Quran from which a few are mentioned in the following due to the abundance of the revelations (the number of the verses are listed in footnote for further studies):

a) And if the people of the villages had believed and had the Taqwa (piety), certainly, we should have opened for them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they belied. So we took them (with punishment) for what they used to earn (Surah A’raf, 96). As obvious, the word “village” is used for different settlements rather than the word “Medina” which is justified at the end of the verse; because the residents of the settlements deny the faith and piety and so deserve the word “village” for their habitat rather than the word “city”.

b) 112. And Allah puts forward the example of a village, that dwelt secure and well content; its provision coming to it in abundance from every place, but it (its people) denied the Favours of Allah So Allah made it taste the extreme of hunger (famine) and fear, because of that which they (its people) used to do (Surah Nahl, 112). As the previous verse, the word village is applied due to the lack of residents’ commitment to their faith and ingratitude for God’s blessings.

- Verses containing the word “Medina”

The following verses address the word “Medina” (the number of the verses is listed in footnote for

further studies):

a) And indeed We sent (to Thamud) their brother Salih (Saleh)... And there were in the city nine men (from the sons of their chiefs), who made mischief in the land, and would not reform (Naml, 45-48). In these verses, despite the presence of several iniquitous groups, the word “Medina” is mentioned due to the presence of a righteous man called Saleh in the settlement.

b) Then, when the Messengers (of God) came unto the family of Lout ...And the inhabitants of the city came rejoicing (to sin), Lout said: “Verily! These are my guests, so shame me not. (Hijr, 61-68). In these verses, despite the people being immersed in sins and announcing it, the word “Medina” is mentioned due to the presence of a righteous man called Lout in the settlement. Interestingly, the Holy Quran, refers to this city, as a village when Lout leaves it; meaning the city is reduced to village due to his leaving. This claim is pursuable in Surah Anbia’: and We saved him (Lout) from the village (folk) who practised Al-Khaba’ith (evil, wicked and filthy deeds, etc.) These verses are about the time when Lout leaves the settlement; a departure which reduces the position of a city to village in Quranic literature.

• Conflicting evidences

In addition to the above verses, there are some other verses in the Quran that are in conflict with the article’s argument and they are not applied apparently; meaning that the word Medina is used for settlements with unfaithful and unrighteous residents. However, further investigations reveals that in these verses the word Medina is not applied by God almighty, in contrary to the mentioned verses. In these verses, medina is not the Word of God and the Quran is merely quoting this word from other people of the habitat. The following examples are evidences of this claim:

They said: “Put him and his brother (Moses and his brother) off, and send callers (men) to the cities to collect (A’raf, 111). According to the previous and

following verses of the surah, the verse refers to settlements ruled by Pharaoh before Moses guidance which should be called as Medina according to Quranic literature. Then again in this verse the term Medina is used for explaining their settlements which seemingly contradicts the Quranic literature according to the author. However, further inspection on this verse shows that that this is not the Word of God Almighty in this verse of the Quran and it is quoted (from counselors of Pharaoh) who uttered the word medina. More interestingly, these phrases used in this verse is repeated twice in this Surah Shu'ara'; first in verse 36 and again in verse 53. The verse 36 is a quotation from pharaoh's counselors but this word is uttered directly by God in verse 53 which instills confusions; the claim turns into certainty by further thinking. For further understanding the verse 53 of Surah Shu'ara' and their previous verses are: And We inspired (Moses), saying: "Take away My slaves (from this land and from the realm of tyranny) by night, verily, you will be pursued (by obscurantist enemy), Then Pharaoh sent callers to the cities. (Shu'ara', 52 and 53). In contrast to verse 36, the term Medina is used by God and not Pharaoh's counselors; but further contemplation reveals that these verses are associated with the time of Israelites faith to Moses in contrast to verse 36 (which date back to Moses challenges with witches before the Israelites faith in Moses). Divine revelation on the need to move at night to avoid the army of Pharaoh is and evidence to this claim. Therefore, given that these verses refer to the time when the Israelites were faithful to Moses, the claim of the article is confirmed.

Moreover, there exist apparent contradictions in the verses that contain the word Gharieh (village) which can be resolved through further pondering. In some cases, the word village is used for settlements where people believed in God and it seems in contradiction with Quranic literature. But then, further scrutiny shows that this word is quoted from people and not God. An example of these verses can be seen in Surah A'raf: And the answer of his people was only

that they said: "Drive them out of your village, these are indeed men who want to be pure " (A'raf, 82). This verse refers to the land of Prophet Lout and Medina had to be used according to Quranic literature. However, the word village is used which is obviously quoted from the prophet's opponents since the verse begins with "They said".

Another confliction is apparent when the term mother of villages is used for Mecca: And thus We have inspired unto you a Qur'an in Arabic that you may warn the (people of) Mother of the Villages (Makkah) and all around it (Shurah, 7). It has to be noted that this Surah has come in Mecca before the widespread call of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his movements by the people of Hijaz and settlements around Mecca and the term "warn" is also considered in this regard. Therefore, at the time of the revelation of this verse, yet the people of the land surrounding Mecca, did not believe the invitation of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), and is referred as mother of villages rather than mother of cities. . In other words, at the time of the revelation of this verse, due to the rejection of Islam in territories around Mecca, all lands are considered villages according to the Quran and so Mecca as the center of the villages is called mother of villages. This verse cannot be deduced as in conflict with other verses since it calls the surrounding settlements as villages and not Mecca. The term "mother of villages" is also used for Mecca in verse 92 of Sura An'am in which the mentioned argument applies as well.

As mentioned earlier, the verses containing the word "medina" and "gharieh" are numerous (a total of 74 verses) and checking all the verses is not within the scope of a brief article. But the author has investigated all these verses before giving a conclusion to ensure the validity of this claim. It is concluded that there is no conflict among different verses of the Quran on the queries of the study, but the verses are all supporting each other in Quranic literature. But as mentioned, for further scrutiny of the pursuit by interested readers, the numbers of verses and chapters are presented in footnotes². It's

also important to point out that there is no conflict and disagreement between the different chapters and verses of Quran in case of deep contemplation; Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found there in much contradictions (Nisa', 82). Thus,

the contradictions that may come to mind at first glance are due to the lack of deep contemplation in verses or ignoring of the verses before and after. Some of these contradictions were mentioned previously in some examples.

Conclusion

Regarding the verses investigated in this study and in order to responde the questions queried at the introduction of this article, it can be deduced that the Holy Quran does not recognize population, size, economic and social conditions as the main factors in distinction of city and village. However, other indicators such as faith in God and commitment to Islam are the main criteria in making urban areas distinct from rural areas. Accordingly, in the Quranic literature every habitat is not worthy to be called a city despite having great population and size; because according to Quran, the main factor for referring civilization to a human habitat is faith in God Almighty and the absence of this factor leads to degradation of habitat to a village regardless of its size and population. An example of degradation of civilization is introduced in Surah Ya-sin in which Antakya is mentioned as a "village" despite having a great area and population. Investigating the reason for Quran's emphasis on faith of citizens and their commitment to their beliefs requires serious researches on the next step. Broadly it can be said that on the basis of Quranic literature in several verses, those without faith have been introduced without actual human life and it is obvious that those who are interpreted as "dead" by Quran cannot advance civilization and develop civic centers of life.

Accordingly, it can be deduced that the religious city (which correspond to the Quranic literature) and ordinary city (which corresponds to the current literature in the field of urban development) are primarily two distinct concepts which accentuates the need for further research and deeper contemplation about the city and its components on the basis of Islamic teachings and particularly Quranic perspective. Similarly, the Quranic Islamic village is also different from the ordinary village. The results of the study do not aim to undermine rural culture and the term village in Quranic literature. Generalizing the research results to the existing villages is an obvious mistake; since there might be villages that should be entitled as city according to the Quranic literature and conversely, there are large cities that should be considered dead village in Quran's point of view.

Endnote

1. And it is He Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His Mercy (rain). Till when they have carried a heavy-laden cloud, We drive it to a land that is dead, then We cause water (rain) to descend thereon. Then We produce every kind of fruit therewith (from land). Similarly, We shall raise up the dead, so that you may remember or take heed. (A'raf, 57)

The vegetation of a good land comes forth by the Permission of its Lord, and that which is bad (its plant), brings forth nothing but a little with difficulty. Thus do We explain variously the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) (and repeat continuously) for a people who give thanks. (A'raf, 58)

That We may give life thereby to a dead land, and We give to drink thereof many of the cattle and men that We had created. (Furqan, 49)

All above translation are reported from Al-Mizan interpretations and the author has not included his opinion.

2. The verses containing the words "Medina" and "Madayin (plural of Medina)" are as follows. It has to be noted that in some verses the word "Medina" is used as a proper noun which refers to Madinat-al-nabi which is obviously not within the scope and claim of this paper:

A'raf 123, Taubah 101, Taubah 120, Yusuf 30, Hijr 67, Kahf 19, Kahf 82, Naml 48, Qasas 18, Qasas 20, Ahzab 60, Ya-Sin 20, Munafiqun 8, Qasas 15, A'raf 111, Su'ara' 36, Shu'ara' 53

The verses containing the words "Medina" and "Gharieh" are as follows:

Baqarah 58, Baqarah 259, Nisa' 75, An'am 92, An'am 123, A'raf 82, A'raf 88, A'raf 94, A'raf 96, A'raf 97, A'raf 98, A'raf 101, A'raf 161, A'raf 163, Yunus 98, Hud 102, Hud 117, Yusuf 82, Yusuf 109, Hijr 4, Nahl 112, Asra' 16, Isra' 58, Kahf 77, Anbiya' 6, Anbiya' 11, Anbiya' 74, Anbiya' 95, Haj 45, Haj 48, Furqan 40, Furqan 50, Furqan 51, Shu'ara' 208, Naml 34, Naml 56, Qasas 58, Qasas 59, Ankabut 31, Ankabut 34, Saba' 18, Saba' 34, Ya-sin 13, Shra 7, Zukhruf 23, Zukhruf 31, Ahqaf 27, Mohammad 13, Hashr 7, Hashr 14, Talaq 8

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