

## Original Research Article

## Rejecting the Theory of Islamic City as a Form

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**.Abstract**

**Problem statement:** Numerous, various, and sometimes conflicting definitions of Islamic city by Iranian and non-Iranian researchers have resulted in confusion about its concept as far as physical views are concerned. The challenge arises from the combination of two complex and wide-ranging categories: ‘city’ and ‘Islam.’ It is not easy to establish a connection between these two broad multi-layered (from surface to internal layers) concepts since it requires a deep theoretical and practical foundation.

**Research objective:** This paper aims to examine the concept of city in authentic religious texts. The best source which helps to understand the truth of the Islamic city and its meaning is the Quran.

**Research method:** This research draws on an exegetical-analytic method. About the Quran as the main source of the research, it deploys an exegetical-interpretive method, and for this purpose, we have relied on the well-known Quranic exegesis, al-Mīzān. Moreover, to compare the Islamic theory of city and that of Orientalists about an Islamic city, the advantage is taken of the analytic-comparative method.

**Conclusion:** Given the results of this Quranic research, we conclude that the concept of an Islamic city goes beyond forms and physical bodies, amounting to a cultural (doctrinal-behavioral) aspect. The theory of Quranic city highlights three main ingredients of the conceptual structure of a city—that is, people, law, and urban government—and stands against the predominant physical approach in mainstream research. The Quranic utopia is an axiological-normative concept constituted by human relations. In this Islamic-Quranic utopia, a city consists of a combination of one’s relation with God, oneself, others, and nature in terms of different political, economic, cultural, and physical systems.

**Keywords:** *Islamic city, Orientalists, Islam, Utopia, Dystopia.*

**Introduction**

Upon considering sources and texts associated with Islamic cities, it turns out that no comprehensive, accurate, and profound definition has ever been

proposed for the notion of an Islamic city. A specification of the notion is rendered difficult by numerous, various, and sometimes conflicting definitions offered for it by Iranian intellectuals. Moreover,

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there is hardly a conceptual structural approach to the notion of Islamic city by Iranian scholars. Eastern and western approaches often tend to turn on the physical body of a city. These challenges arise from the combination of the two complex wide-ranging categories of 'city' and 'Islam' as it is not easy to establish a connection between these two broad multi-layered (from surface to internal layers) concepts since it requires a deep theoretical and practical prop, which has never consistently been actualized. Thus, the research becomes necessary because no religious prop has been offered for the Islamic city. Undoubtedly, the Quran is the best source to attain the nature and concept of the Islamic city since it is the only religious text, which is not distorted. As to the interpretation of the depths of the Quran, we have relied on 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegesis.

### Research method

The research method in this paper is exegetical-analytic. To refer to the Quran as the main source of the research, the exegetical-interpretive method is deployed by drawing on the Quranic exegesis *al-Mīzān* by 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Moreover, in comparing the Islamic theory of city and that of Orientalists concerning the Islamic city, the analytic-comparative method is considered. In this research, in the style of 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī's method in his *al-Mīzān* (that is, verse-by-verse exegesis), Quranic verses and their interconnections are considered. Thus the verses are not individually examined. Instead, they are considered as a network, and the term city is derived from them.

The study proceeds in the following steps:

- A review of eastern and western theories of the Islamic city;
- A review of Quranic verses related to the city (those in which the term and its supplements appear) and consideration of the relevant Quranic exegeses, particularly *al-Mīzān*;
- Investigation of the context in which the relevant Quranic verses occur to secure a deeper grasp of the verses and the interconnections of the themes;

- Derivation of definitions and characteristics of the city from the Quranic verses;
- A comparison of the Quranic account of the characteristics of the city with the theories offered by eastern and western scholars about the Islamic city.

### Research background

#### • Orientalism and the 'Islamic City'

The first period of Oriental studies includes the Morocco School, the Damascus School, and their combination. In this period, Orientalists coined the term "Islamic city," resting content with a formal (appearance-related) expression of the Islamic city compared to European cities. In the second period, revisionist accounts appeared, in which the society and the structure of the urban community as the body of the Islamic city were considered. In this period, the term "Islamic city," was taken into question, and then in the third period, critical, new, and nativist views are considered. On the third approach, native theorists highlight a multi-dimensional reading of the Islamic city's original primary sources. Although in the second and third periods, attempts were made to provide an accurate definition, account, and characterization of the Islamic city, and to derive proper criteria for characterization of the Islamic city, they practically failed. Many particular properties of Islamic cities were inaccurately generalized to all Islamic cities, as the studies of the Islamic city tended to be dominated by a formal view.

For instance, from Abu-Lughod's point of view, vital elements of an ideal Islamic city include a congregational mosque (*masjid jāmi'*), a bazaar adjacent to the mosque, and a public bathhouse. Because these are the elements that provide the conditions for a Muslim's worship (Abu-Lughod, 1987). Sauvaget believes that elements of an ideal Islamic city include a bazaar and a central square, connected to a network of commercial and residential roads, holding that all these constructions and elements are indeed variants of urban elements of earlier periods, e.g. Greco-Roman cities

(Sauvaget, 1934). Here is how von Grunebaum describes the form of an ideal Islamic city: it consists of two main centers—the congregational mosque and bazaars. As a religious, political, and spiritual center, the congregational mosque is located along the main urban roads and streets or at their intersection. Besides the congregational mosque, the governmental building—that is, the governor's or ruler's palace—is located. Throughout Islamic territories, bazaars have the same form and functional hierarchies. In the economic part of the city, unity is on display, while in its residential areas, isolationist tendencies are seen. Each neighborhood is exclusive to a group of people who build their own mosques, bathhouses, and bazaars (Von Grunebaum, 1961).

Orientalists seem to have adopted a peculiar approach both in their goals and the method of consideration of the Islamic city. They aimed to gain a purchase on the physical body of the Islamic city, attributing any physical element of cities in Islamic territories to Islam and its values. In contrast, the relation between Islam and the city was neither complete nor inclusive. Instead, it was limited to certain contexts in these cities. This is notwithstanding the fact that the nature of the Islamic city is not properly studied merely by observing the cities located in Islamic lands something is often done by Orientalists even though there are elements of an Islamic city in each of these cities.

Here is the gist of Orientalist accounts of the pillars and elements of the Islamic city (including the accounts provided by Grabar, Bemat, Besim Selim Hakim, Abu-Lughod, Sauvaget, von Grunebaum, among others): city center (mosque, bazaar, school, and the governmental palace), neighborhoods, suburbs in the form of urban and access areas, urban services, infrastructures and facilities, and military and defensive fortifications (Pourmohammadi, Habibi, Bahrayni & Davoodpour, 2020). However, such formalist accounts offered by Orientalists, face internal contradictions and remarkably conflict with one another.

The above scholars have provided only scratched the surface of non-physical elements of the Islamic city in their works, and the diluted accounts they have offered of such elements greatly differ. When it comes to non-physical elements of the city (that is, the concept of the Islamic city), the majority of Orientalists have overlooked the single divine-Islamic law and shared values of Muslims in Islamic cities. Their works do not involve any reference to the shared culture of Muslims as arising from the divine-Islamic law. Some Orientalists such as Sauvaget (1934) take the Islamic city as the place where conflicting individuals and tastes come together; some like Grabar (2011) see it as a collection of tensions and contradictions, as enduring as it, thinking of it as a place of division<sup>1</sup> and focused on relations, instead of regulations. Some Orientalists believe that the Islamic city lacks structure, order, and social and civil unity, although Bemat has talked about the coherence and unity of the Islamic city (Bemat, 2014). In keeping with the Quranic account of the city, an urban Islamic community is a unified notion, which confirms Bemat's account.

The 'Islamic city' is a term coined by Orientalists (Falahat, 2011), but it does not square well with what is expected of an Islamic city as construed by Islamic scholars. It is conceived from an external perspective, involving a host of contradictions and differences. Orientalists have surveyed a few instances of cities in Islamic lands and then generalized their characteristics to all Islamic cities. They tend to provide a formal description of the city, viewing an Islamic city in terms of its physical body, while it seems that Islam tends to highlight people's moral and cognitive characters and their insights. In other words, individual and social characters of inhabitants of the city, without directly or immediately taking the city's physical body into account.

Along with the external non-religious perspective of Orientalists, it is worth adopting a religious approach to the notion of the Islamic city to come up

with a comprehensive view of the notion, which will be considered in what follows.

• **Islamic City and Eastern Scholars (Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, etc.)**

According to Jahānbakhsh, two main methods of speculation about Islamic art and architecture can be categorized into two groups. The groups include those methods or approaches that see Islamic architecture and art as a phenomenon that emerged at a specific point in history and geography, which then declined or expired after globalization and the dominance of the modern civilization. This is eminently displayed in the historiographical methods of Orientalists (Jahānbakhsh, Amīnpūr & Pīrūzmand, 2018).

Second, some seek a model different from Western civilization for human societies, including art and architecture. In this camp, traditionalists are better known in academic circles, particularly in the West, and they have been more successful in their analysis and critique of western civilization. Another group in this camp are Islamic textualists who, given their expertise in art and architecture and lack of the relevant expertise concerning religious texts, are not authoritative in their understanding of Quranic verses and Islamic traditions (or hadiths). Moreover, all questions associated with art and architecture cannot be answered by direct reference to sources of hadiths. The method of individual jurisprudence (fiqh) has solved the first problem, but it still suffers from the second problem (ibid.).

Since Islamic jurisprudence is the only Islamic science concerned with the management of social behaviors, the latter group can, unlike traditionalists, face up to the modern civilization at an individual level. However, the modern civilization involves complex convoluted layers of management of social regulations, in which individual jurisprudence cannot be a match, and in practice, it would surrender to passivity in its encounter with unprecedented and urgent problems. The structure of individual jurisprudence is solely designed and optimized to specify the individual's practical obligations, rather than planning and administrating the person's

“organization and society.” For this reason, to compensate the deficiency, revisions are required in the principles and methods of Islamic jurisprudence by presenting jurisprudence of the order (fiqh al-nizām) through which its contribution to architecture and urbanization can be organized. There have been many problems that could not be solved by reference to Quranic verses and hadiths following the methods of individual jurisprudence, but inferences could be made about them given the implications and systematic network interconnections of jurisprudential rulings (ibid.).

On this classification, eastern (Iranian and non-Iranian) intellectuals who have studied the Islamic city falls within the second category. They have described and analyzed the Islamic city with a method discussed below.

Drawing on the method of the jurisprudence of the order and through comprehensive consideration of Quranic verses and hadiths, Araki (2018) divides urban areas into three: neighborhoods, city center, and suburbs. A neighborhood is defined by forty houses from the neighborhood's mosque in the four directions, and the mosque counts as the neighborhood's center. The city's diagonal is 12 miles (four parasangs), and the suburb is at the distance of four parasangs from the main area of the city. The city center is its greatest or congregational mosque. Furthermore, Araki divides urban services regarding the above three areas into three categories: services needed by the neighborhood's residents, those needed by all residents of the city, and those needed by travelers. He also specifies regulations for traffics and roads. The hypotheses developed by Araki following relevant hadiths concerning the physical structure of the Islamic city, including but not restricted to the above, are accurate and indicative of certain properties of such a city. Still, the identity of the Islamic city goes beyond its physical body, as characterized in hadiths and as pointed out by Arākī himself in terms of the spirit of the Islamic city (under sharia-based or legitimate city).

Taking advantage of the method of textualism

and individual jurisprudence, Mortada (2008) considers the link between sharia and the Islamic city, believing that the city should manifest the notion of umma (Islamic nation). He examines the Islamic city in terms of commercial residential, and religious, educational, and industrial centers, explaining how they are formed and how they relate to Islamic values, particularly social values. On his account, the manifestation of the concept of umma is characteristic and definitive of the Islamic city, although, in his considerations, he goes back to physical characters.

Ja'far Murtaḍā 'Āmilī (2010) provides an account of the Islamic city in terms of environment, lights, roads and streets, commercial areas, facilities, and public places, investigating Quranic and Islamic traditional recommendations about each of these. Based on the method of individual jurisprudence, he searches Quranic verses and hadiths to find the physical characteristics of the Islamic city. Thus, he too views the Islamic city in terms of its physical properties.

In his book *Az andīsha tā zuhūr-i Shahr-i Islāmī* (Islamic city: from idea to manifestation), Naghizadeh (2017) tries to combine the views of the two camps, reconciling the physical manifestation of the Islamic city with the Islamic thought. He investigates the environment, neighborhoods, religious places, accommodation, access and the network of pathways, workspace (commerce, industry, and services), educational space, leisure facilities, public elements and public interest, urban and public spaces, and management system in the Islamic city. He aims to consider both aspects of the Islamic city—the content or concept and the physical body—but the physical aspect is prominent in his work.

Scholars such as Farjām, Soleymānī Moqadam & Chāwushī (2011), Ayāzī (2008), Barqī & Taqdīsī (2008), Dānīsh (2010), Taqwāyī & Khudāyī (2011), Sharīfīyān, Pūrja'far & Taqwāyī (2017), and others have also contributed to the research on the Islamic city, examining such properties in terms of Quranic

verses, Quranic exegeses, and hadiths (including those in *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādiyya*, and *Nahj al-Balāgha*). Some of these studies are summarized in Table 1. While some of these studies concern non-physical conceptual characteristics of the city (such as security and human dignity, healthy self-sufficient economy, social justice, the single nation, spirituality, and religiosity), they again prioritize physical characteristics.

While these eastern and western scholars tried to establish the proper connection between the content and the physical body of the Islamic city, they failed in practice, as they ended up focusing on the latter.

The present research aims to examine Quranic content and doctrines as foundations of the morality, knowledge, and insight of the residents of the city, wherewith these characteristics instantiated by people, the physical manifestation of the Islamic city will also be exemplified.

## Theoretical foundations

### • The Relation between Islam and City

Quranic verses imply the relationship between Islam as a religion and the city as a manifestation of civilization established through the city dwellers and their lifestyle in the city. Persons as citizens, city governors, and city builders play a particular role in the city, where if each of them makes the right connection to Islam in the sense that they act upon the theoretical and practical principles of Islam, are committed to Islamic laws, and internalize Islamic values. The city made by them throughout time will exhibit Islamic characteristics since it will naturally be a result of Islam and its residents' faith in Islamic values.

Scholars such as Fārābī, as well as Ḥabībī and Ḥujjat, have offered various definitions of the city. Fārābī believes that a city (*madīna*) is a place where a large group of rational animals gather from different neighborhoods and parts, and make arrangements about the requirements of collective life and organize the advantages they deserve through a postulation and application of certain commands

Table 1. Summary of studies by some Iranian scholars about the characteristics of the Islamic city. Source: Authors.

The scholar of theorist	Relevant Quranic verse of hadith	The characteristic of the Islamic city	The scholar of theorist	Relevant Quranic verse of hadith	The characteristic of the Islamic city
Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, al-Balad, 1-2	Center for worship and propagation of Islamic monotheism	Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, Sabā, 15	Absence of class gap
Ayāzī (2008)	---	Propagation of spirituality and religiosity (as preparatory for security)	---	Quran, Kahf, 19	Legitimate business and commerce
‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī	Quran, Baqara, 126	Sharia-based security (legislation)	Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, Nisā’, 75	Freedom of expression and belief
Ayāzī (2008)	Quran, Baqara, 126	Security in beliefs (confidence)	Ayāzī (2008)	Quran, Tīn, 3 and Balad, 1	Residence of the pious and the knowledgeable
Ayāzī (2008)	Quran, Yūnus, 98	Security in practice (behavioral)	Ayāzī (2008)	Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 407 and letter 53	Reign of the wise (rightful leadership): reformation, construction of the city, consultation with the wise and with scholars
Farjām (2013)	Quran, Naḥl, 112	Social, economic, and natural security		Nahj al-balāgha, letter 53	Kindness and grace to the subjects
Makārim	Makārim Shīrāzī, 1992, V. 10, 366	Security as the condition for permanent blessing	Ayāzī (2008)	---	Enjoyment of order, planning, and government in urban affairs
‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī	Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2007, V. 12, 522; Imam al-Sajjād, 1992, 107	Abundant cheap livelihood (after assurance as a result of security)	Jawādī Āmulī, 2012	---	Development of public space (mosques, schools, hospitals, gardens, cultural centers, etc.) and urban services
Ayāzī (2008)	Quran, Baqara, 126; Imam al-Sajjād, 1992, 27	Welfare and comfort (economic development)	Ayāzī (2008)		Equality in citizenship rights for everyone
Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, Naml, 91	A city respected, dignified, and reputed by virtue of the residence of Muslims and their sanctuaries	Makārim Shīrāzī	Quran, Sabā, 15	A healthy environment (cleanliness, good weather, fertile ground, and abundance of water)
Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, A’rāf, 57-58 (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1992, V. 6, 213-216)	A dynamic place full of life (economic thriving)	Makārim Shīrāzī	Quran, Sabā, 15 (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1992, V. 18, 58)	Cleanliness (pure from all sorts of pollutions)
Farjām et al. (2012)	Quran, Furqān, 49 (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1992, V. 5, 118)	Easy access to fundamental services and facilities	Sattārī (2013)	---	City as a complete community through a contract of brotherhood
Makārim Shīrāzī ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī	Quran, Sabā, 15 (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2007, vol. 16:549)	Construction and flourishing (gardens and fertile grounds) and economic thriving	Imam Šādiq	Kulaynī, 2008, V. 3, 223	Good treatment of the neighbor paves the way for the thriving of the city, and maltreatment of the neighbor paves the way for its destruction
Makārim Shīrāzī	Quran, Sabā, 15	Security	Imam Sajjād	Imam al-Sajjād, 1992, 152	Resistance and permanence of cities as a result of Muslims’ power, prudence, and self-esteem

Rest of Table 1.

The scholar of theorist	Relevant Quranic verse of hadith	The characteristic of the Islamic city	The scholar of theorist	Relevant Quranic verse of hadith	The characteristic of the Islamic city
Imam al-Sajjād	section 3 of Ibn Bābawayh, 1995; Qummī, 1993, under t-j-r	People’s jobs should be in the cities of their residence, rather than other cities	Imam al-Sajjad	Imam al-Sajjād, 1992, 153	Rightful leadership (the fourteen infallible): they are guides and pillars of cities
Sharīfiyān et al.	---	Social aspect: law, sovereignty, congregation, relationship, ownership	Sharīfiyān et al.	---	This-worldly aspect: accommodation, livelihood, construction, and security
Sharīfiyān et al.	---	Divine aspect: worship (performance of prayers), teachings, self-purification, remembrance, reflection, and donation	Sharīfiyān et al.	---	Civilizational aspect: the connective world of the generation

in cooperation and collaboration with one another to meet their individual and collective needs for purposes of happiness and prosperity (Fārābī, 2010, 152). According to Habibi, the tradition of creating a space and place reflects the triad of culture (historical knowledge of life), technical science of the time, and nature, and the ultimate consequence of the triad is the formation of a city, which is why the city acquires an anthropological existence (Habibi, 2015, 69). Ḥujjat holds that three factors are involved in the description and formation of the city: geography (place, space, and environment), time (undergone by the place and experiences accumulated over time), and human beliefs (religion) (Ḥujjat,n.d). What is common to all these definitions is the presence of people (citizens and governors) and the law by which they are ruled.

The law that constitutes the city and organizes the relationships arises from the worldview governing the society (divine or material laws), forming the lifestyle, citizenship culture, and civilization, and finally, the city emerges as a city (Araki, 2018). The book of the law in Islam is the Quran.

Islam as an intellectual system constituting the human worldview affects the structural dimensions of the city through every individual in the society. Through the Quran and religious leaders, such as Shiite Imams, Islam forms the people’s intellectual

and doctrinal system, and by creating a peculiar lifestyle, it gives rise to a behavioral network (practice) that in turn produces and adjusts its relevant environment. That is if Islamic intellectual foundations are realized in the city and among people, other dimensions will emerge in compliance with this intellectual system. In the following, we examine the Quranic lifestyle which paves the way for the formation of the Islamic city.

• **The Quranic theory of city**

With reference to Quranic encyclopedias such as Mu‘jam al-mufahras, we have chosen the terms “balad,” “qarya,” “madīna,” and “miṣr” as synonymous with the English term “city”. Through a review of the Quran and by the deployment of the Quranic software, Nūr, we searched Quranic verses in which these terms appear to inquire about the characteristics of the city. Moreover, we have extracted relevant supplementary verses in which light is shed on these four concepts to bring the relevant phenomenon of the city (utopia and dystopia) into the open. In this research, we deploy ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s method in al-Mīzān (interpretation of a verse by a verse). Thus, we do not consider Quranic verses individually. Instead, we consider them in systematic terms alongside other verses to derive the Quranic notion of the city. The upshot of the research into Quranic verses and

their exegeses is that there are two kinds of cities in the Quran: utopia (virtuous city) and dystopia (vicious city).

The Quranic utopia is an axiological-normative concept constituted in terms of human relationships. In this Islamic-Quranic utopia, an individual lifestyle is formed by one's relationship with God, with oneself, with others, and with nature, which in turn constitutes social, economic, political, and other relationships at the social level, which forms the collective lifestyle. Ultimately, there is the lifestyle of Muslims as inhabitants, governors, and designers of the city in terms of the Quranic thought, which would naturally and innately affect the form and physical body of the city.

The Quranic theory of the city highlights three elements of the conceptual structure of the city (i.e., people, the law, and urban government) and thus, it is contrasted to the physical approach adopted by the majority of scholars in the field. These three elements constitute the main structure of each city, and the way they relate to one another and their mutual impacts create the form of the city. Neither people nor governments can solely pave the way for the realization of the Islamic city. Instead, they can prepare the ground for such a city in collaboration and virtue of Islamic doctrines (the governing law). The government makes preparations for the implementation of justice in the city, and people help realize an Islamic city by a commitment to morality, spirituality, and Islamic values (the Islamic law). On this account, the Islamic city as a religious city will be formed by emphasizing the conceptual aspect under Islam and Quranic doctrines. Below is a description of the respective lifestyles of Quranic utopia and dystopia as the main contribution of this research.

## Discussion

### • Utopia

In the Quran, the term “balad” is equivalent to utopia. The Quranic utopia is a city in which people develop their intellectual (doctrinal) and

behavioral characteristics on the model of the Quran and hadiths. The city's ruler is God's successor (or khalīfa) who enforces justice in keeping with the divine commands. Moreover, urban law is the monotheistic law of the Quran and divine justice. As a matter of fact, these three features have never been exemplified together in any city so that it might qualify as a Quranic utopia or “balad”.

Given the Quranic verses investigated in this research, “balad” is a utopia or a virtuous city in which the right government is established as the enabler of justice with truth-seeking people (believers in one God and all prophets). This is a city where everyone (both the governor and citizens) acts justly and complies with monotheistic laws—where there is pure life.<sup>2</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow us to deal with exegeses of Quranic verses in which the term “Balad” occurs. Thus, we rest content with the gist of the exegeses of the relevant verses as far as people's lifestyle is concerned. For example, we consider exegeses of the first verses of Sūra al-Balad in the Quran to specify how the keywords are derived.

In this research, we have chosen different exegeses of Sūra al-Balad in the Quran as samples, which yielded the following results:

1. Sūra al-Balad in al-Mīzān ([Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2007, V. 20, 482-486](#)): From an overall view of the early verses of Sūra al-Balad it follows that there should be a strong harmony or accord between an oath and what the oath is taken for. A city, particularly Mecca, is so important that the Quran swears by it, followed by a remark about “balad.”

The first two verses of this Quranic chapter (sūra) mean: While it is not required to swear, I swear by this city, where you reside. This is a reminder that Mecca is honored in virtue of its being the place of the Prophet's birth and residence. A sanctuary (ḥaram) is esteemed and honored and is not a mere location in that there are things that can be done in an ordinary location but are forbidden in a sanctuary.

2. Sūra al-Balad in Tafsīr Nimūna ([Makārim Shīrāzī, 1992, V. 27, 7-8](#)): I swear by this sacred



city, Mecca, where you reside. Mecca is so dignified that God swears by it since the first center for monotheism and divine worship was built in this city, and great prophets circumambulated around the Ka'ba in Mecca. The sentence "you reside in this city" implies that God swears by Mecca because of the presence in it of Prophet Muhammad, which has given it blessing and dignity.

3. Sūra al-Balad in Majma' al-Bayān (Ṭabrisī, 2011, V. 27, 97): Quranic exegetes have consensus over the view that here God swears by the sanctified city of Mecca, where the city is signified by the Prophet's residence in it—a prophet who calls people to monotheism. This implies that Mecca is honored by the Prophet's presence, and God swears by the city because of him (so the city's dignity arises from his residence there), just as the city of Medina is called "pure" because it was purified by the Prophet's life and death there. In this way, a city derives its significance and integrity from people who live in them, particularly the city's leader who functions as its pillar and as the representative of its inhabitants. In the supplication of "Jāmi'a Kabīra" (The Great Comprehensive Pilgrimage Prayer), the twelve Shiite Imams are characterized as "pillars of cities" in that cities are constituted, dignified, and respected by their presence. Accordingly, a city is honored by the Prophet and his household; by someone who calls people to worship God and only God, not by its walls, gates, and stones. If divine messengers and saints are not respected, the city will be divested of its honor.

4. Sūra al-Balad in Tafsīr hidāyat (Mudarrisī, 1998, V. 18, 111-114): According to Quranic exegetes, "balad" in these verses refers to Mecca, a dignified city. But as dignified as it is, it is not more dignified than God's Apostle. Any land is dignified in virtue of a righteous servant of God who lives there. Hence, the hadith: "a believer's dignity is greater than that of the Ka'ba" (Majlisī, 1982, V. 67, 71).

Given different interpretations of Sūra al-Balad, we can conclude that a city is honored and dignified by its inhabitants, particularly its leader, where the

place of God's successor is much greater than that of the city. Thus, a place's dignity is a matter of freedom, security, and respect its dwellers enjoy. We have also surveyed and considered other Quranic verses concerning "balad" in the same manner, and the outcome is formulated in terms of keywords (Table 2).

#### • Dystopia

Having surveyed the terms denoting city or town in the Quran, we have also investigated the term "qarya" in the Quran, which denotes dystopia. All Quranic verses involving "qarya" refer to a vicious city or town—a dystopia. We have found many Quranic verses related to dystopia since over the history, all actual cities were indeed vicious. The Quran provides a clear-cut description of the characteristics of dystopias, which portray the properties a city should not have. There are several Quranic verses in which the properties of Quranic dystopia ("qarya") are mentioned. In this research, these and other associated verses have been surveyed and considered by reference to al-Mīzān in an interconnected systematic way. Some of these verses and their conceptual keywords, concerned with the lifestyles of people of "qarya," appear in Table 3.<sup>1</sup>

The word "qarya" is also used in the Quran to refer to cities or communities inhabited by the sinful (Baqara, 58 and 159; Nisā', 75; An'ām, 123; A'rāf, 4, 94, and 161; Hījr, 4; Naḥl, 112; Anbiyā', 11) (See Naghizadeh, 2008). This sense of "qarya" with which our research is concerned—as a community of the sinful in a city whose beliefs and moral characters are listed in table 3. Below is an exemplary exegesis of Quranic verses concerning "qarya."

Being ungrateful to God's blessings is a moral behavioral characteristic of dwellers of "qarya". Consequently, as a result of which they would be deprived of the blessings, which in turn leads to a dystopia: "Such ungratefulness is followed by the destruction of fertile grounds and being left with arid barren lands with bitter plants and salty fields, as well as the increased distance between cities and insecurity on roads, while before that cities were at

Table 2. The lifestyle of the inhabitants of “Balad” (pure life): summary of supplementary Quranic verses. Source: Authors.

No.	Characteristics	Quranic verses
1	Believer (Abrahamic creed, hanīf [orthodox], moderate, and monotheistic religion, and later prophets), only colored with God’s color, worshiping God	Baqara, 135-141; Naḥl, 120-121; Ra’d, 19-24
2	Legitimate livelihood	Baqara, 168
3	Faith and righteous deed	Naḥl, 97; Muḥammad, 35-36
4	Thanks-giving	Naḥl, 120-121
5	Obedience of God	Naḥl, 120-121; Ra’d, 19-24
6	Lack of worldliness and cupidity about this world	Tāhā, 131; Muḥammad, 35-36
7	Praying	Tāhā, 131; Ra’d, 19-24
8	Piety	Tāhā, 131; Ṭalāq, 2-3; Ra’d, 19-24
9	Belief in God, His apostle, and following them	Muḥammad, 35-36; Ṭalāq, 2-3
10	Hardness against unbelievers	Muḥammad, 35-36
11	Remembrance of God in all moments of life and submission to God (Islām)	An’ām, 163
12	Being on the right path	Ghāfir, 38-39
13	This world as a means for obtaining provisions for the afterlife by the pious and believers	Ghāfir, 38-39
14	Resurrection (certainty about the day of reckoning)	Ṭalāq, 2-3; Ḥāqqa, 11-21 (The pleasant life)
15	Trust in God	Ṭalāq, 2-3
16	Keeping the covenant with God	Ra’d, 19-24
17	Patience in seeking livelihood from God	Ra’d, 19-24
18	Donation	Ra’d, 19-24
19	Removal of the ill with the good	Ra’d, 19-24
20	Honor and dignity of people of city	Balad, 1-3

Table 3. Beliefs, moral characters, and conducts of people of “Qarya”. Srouce: Authors.

No.	Characteristics	Quranic verses
1	Breaking promises (with God and with people)	Baqara, 63-74; Tāhā, 115-126
2	Condoning the truth, while seeing it (disregard for God’s signs), sealed hearts	Baqara, 63-74; An ‘ām, 21-32; Tāhā, 115-126
3	Transgression of divine commands, and obedience of Satan	Baqara, 63-74; Baqara, 35-39; Tāhā, 115-126
4	Human-like animals	Baqara, 63-74
5	People of “qarya” being deprived of blessings because of their sins and their disobedience of divine commands (a horrible city, void of blessings)	Baqara, 35-39; Sabā, 10-21; An ‘ām, 6-7
6	People who indulge in revelry (preoccupied with food and lust) and lovers of this world	Ghāfir, 69-78; Tāhā, 115-126
7	Unbelievers and polytheists	Ghāfir, 69-78; An ‘ām, 21-32; Fuṣṣilat, 40-54; Yūnus, 98-100
8	Disputing about and denying divine signs	Ghāfir, 69-78; An ‘ām, 21-32
9	Denial of the Prophet and his book, and fabrication of lies against God and His Apostle and divine signs	Ghāfir, 69-78; An ‘ām, 21-32; Fuṣṣilat, 40-54
10	Disbelief in monotheism, resurrection, and prophethood	An ‘ām, 21-32; Ghāfir, 21-54; Fuṣṣilat, 40-54
11	Disbelief, obstinacy, dispute, and hostility	An ‘ām, 21-32; Ghāfir, 21-54; Fuṣṣilat, 40-54
12	Wronging themselves and wronging others	An ‘ām, 21-32
13	Priding themselves with their property and children and seeing themselves (rather than God) as their real owners	Kahf, 32-46
14	Nudity	Tāhā, 115-126
15	People without sanctuaries	Tāhā, 115-126
16	People of excess and transgression	Ghāfir, 21-54
17	Lie and hypocrisy	Ghāfir, 21-54; Yūsuf, 63-82; Ḥashr, 11-17; Isrā’, 56-65; Shu ‘arā’, 192-227
18	Skepticism	Ghāfir, 21-54
19	Arrogant, selfish, and haughty	Ghāfir, 21-54
20	Seeing their blessings as eternal, believing that they deserve them, and disappointing when encountering calamities	Fuṣṣilat, 40-54
21	Death of the Earth’s dwellers because of their disbelief	Ḥadīd, 17
22	Self-interest, hypocrisy, selling less than is due, using short measures	Shu ‘arā’, 176-191
23	Corruption on the Earth	A ‘rāf, 4-5; Yūsuf, 63-82; ‘Ankabūt, 14-40; Shu ‘arā’, 141-159
	They might have all or only some of these characteristics	

equal distances from one another and roads were safe during days and nights. With ungratefulness, all these blessings were taken away from them” (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2007, V. 16, 549). These descriptions appear in verses 10- 21 of Sūra Sabā. Ungratefulness culminates in hidden and manifest calamities (An’ām, 6-7) in the city, including insecurity, starvation, and hunger. In contemporary cities, such calamities might appear as pandemics, droughts, climate change, pollutions, cost escalations, people’s indifference to one another and their relatives and friends, increased commutes, and distance between one’s home and one’s workplace. These are worldly calamities, but the main punishment of “qarya” dwellers, according to the Quran, would be their misery, which results in afterlife suffering (ibid., V. 7, 22). Somewhere else, in the exegesis of verses 71- 76 of Sūra al-Nisā’, it is asserted that if people of Mecca (particularly their heads) did injustice to, oppressed, or impoverished a group of people, it would turn into a “qarya” and would cease being a pure city, as dignified as it is. Thus, according to the Quranic perspective, city leaders and dwellers should act upon the divine law (the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet and his household) and should not do any injustice; otherwise, their city would stop being a “Balad” (a virtuous city or utopia).

## Conclusion

It follows from our research into the Quranic perspective on the city and our survey of the literature on the Islamic city that the term “Islamic city” was coined by Orientalists to refer to what they had observed about some cities in Islamic territories, while these are not Islamic cities, indeed, and the use of this term about past or present cities is inaccurate and somewhat absurd. The Quranic account of the Islamic utopia or virtuous city is radically different from what has historically been implemented by Muslim governments and people in keeping with their facilities and conditions under the name of Islam. The Islamic city has been investigated by both eastern and western intellectuals in terms of

its physical form, while given the Quranic view its reality lies beyond its form in the realization of the Islamic insight and manner; that is, morality, spirituality, and human values such as justice in the city.

According to our research into the Quran (based on its exegesis particularly in al-Mīzān), the Quran takes account of the axiological-normative concept of the city rather than its physical form. Of course, there are hadiths in the Islamic tradition in which the physical form of the Islamic city is described, as reflected in Araki’s hypotheses, what we have been trying to do was that the concept of the Islamic city is, in Quranic terms, prior and preferable to its physical appearances. As indicated by our research, the Quran sees urban relationships in terms of man’s relationship to oneself, to God, to other people, and to nature. It is from an adjustment of such relationships in the city that the concept of the Islamic city arises, in which a host of individual, social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental relationships can be defined. In this way, the Islamic city is realized through actual relations in social life. And importantly, all such relationships should comply with the pivotal doctrine of Islam. One such relationship is that of power, which is seen in Islam as a form of guardianship (wilāya), or its system of economy and market is not based on interests and is instead grounded in providing services to people.

As implied by our research into the Quran, the Islamic city should be viewed as a cultural (doctrinal and behavioral) concept beyond a physical form. According to Quranic teachings, once such a concept is properly internalized in the minds of scholars and people, its physical form will follow accordingly. That is, as pointed out by urban scholars, content is prior to the physical form. Thus, in the Islamic city, the content (that is, Quranic teachings) is antecedent to the physical form, and as long as the content is not embodied, the physical form cannot be exemplified. Accordingly, given the crucial position of an intellectual system to other urban systems (such as social, economic, political, and physical systems), if

the city is shaped by the intellectual factor (or the worldview), it will manifest itself in other (political, social, economic, etc.) systems as well. Here, hadiths serve as interpreters of the Quran, offering the city's political, social, economic, and physical characteristics.

The Islamic city is, regardless of its peculiarities, a city. Thus it is subject to other rules of a city, which consists of three tenets: people, governors, and the law. These three structural elements are present in the Islamic city as well. On the Quranic account, people's lifestyles, its rulers, and the associated laws are the constituents of the background, basic structure of the city from inside. The external manifestation of such a cognitive-behavioral structure will accompany other properties such as the region's ecosystem, the technology of the time, and the life history (or the culture) of the city.

## Endnote

1. It is only Bemat (2014) who talks about a warm, unified, and coherent community as analogous to a home. In his words, the whole city constitutes a home.
2. For more about "balad," see Pourmohammadi et al, 2019.
3. For more about "qarya" see Pourmohammadi et al, 2020.

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